

## CHAPTER 5

### THE EUCHARIST

#### 5.1. INTRODUCTION

The earliest Eucharist is a symbolic ceremony. In chapter 1, I suggested that symbolic rites carry *meaning* because they are performed for a *reason* and they add *value* to people's lives (cf Beattie 1968:69-70). Therefore, the aim<sup>1</sup> of this chapter is to investigate the *reason* why the first followers of Jesus participated in the Eucharist, what it *meant* for them and what kind of *value* it added to their lives. In addition to this, I shall also consider the origin of the earliest Eucharist, since this might indicate the role alternate states of consciousness (as discussed in chapter 2) played in the earliest celebrations of the Lord's Supper. Here the summary at the end of chapter 1 is relevant: By means of the rites of baptism and the Eucharist, the early church "re-enacted" alternate states of consciousness that Jesus "showed" dynamically during his lifetime, and which they were "told" about by means of anti-language employed by the earliest Jesus-followers.

In the previous chapter, I argued that by means of the ritual of baptism, Jesus-followers were initiated into a new group, the "family of God". This implied a transformation in status, which in turn conferred new roles and responsibilities on the baptized. Here the Eucharist, as a ceremony of integration (see Theißen 1999:121), plays an important role. Regular participation in the Eucharist confirmed these new roles and responsibilities. Neyrey (1991:363) describes this process as follows: "Meals-as-ceremonies replicate the group's basic social system, its values, lines, classifications, and its symbolic world." As I contended in chapter 3, ceremonies are predictable and occur regularly; they are determined, called for, and presided over by officials; and they function to confirm roles and statuses within the chief institutions of the group (Neyrey 1991:362).

My purpose in this chapter is as follows: I shall firstly accord attention to the *reason* why the earliest Jesus-followers participated in the Eucharist, which will entail an examination of the foundation of the earliest Eucharist. Then, I shall discuss the *value* that participation in the Eucharist added to the lives of the earliest Jesus-followers, which will encompass an examination of Eucharistic formulae for traces of anti-language. Lastly, I shall examine the *meaning* which participation in the Eucharist entailed for the earliest Jesus-followers, which will further entail a discussion of holy meals as cultural ceremonial symbols.

## **5.2 REASON: FOUNDATION OF THE EARLIEST EUCHARIST**

### **5.2.1 Introduction**

In this section, I intend to discuss the foundation and origins of the earliest Eucharist in a cursory manner. This topic has been of great scholarly interest for many years and it continues to stimulate debate to the present day (see e.g., Jeremias 1949; Lietzmann [1955] 1967; Bornkamm 1963, 1971; Bultmann 1984; Theißen 1999; Bradshaw 2002; Smith 2003). As in the previous chapter, it is not my intention to offer a complete survey of all the issues at stake. I shall only refer to certain aspects that I regard as valuable for the topic discussed in this chapter.

In the following section, I shall indicate where one should start looking for the origin of the earliest Eucharist. Then, since the Eucharist is a ceremonial *meal*, I shall spend some time on the form of first-century Mediterranean meals. The formulae of institution as we find them in Paul and Mark are also important for the understanding of the foundation of the earliest Eucharist. Attention will also be given to the questions concerning the similarities with the Israelite Passover tradition, and the apocalyptic banquet. I shall conclude this section with a discussion of the last meal Jesus had with his disciples as well as his other meals, which I consider as the foundation of the earliest Eucharist.

In other words, this section of the chapter will describe Jesus' "showing", which was the *reason* the earliest Jesus-followers participated in the Eucharist.

### 5.2.2 Origins of the earliest Eucharist

In the search for the origins of the earliest Eucharist, one comes across more questions than answers.<sup>2</sup> Bradshaw (2002:72) observes that there "is relatively little about which we can be sure with regard to this subject," especially since the New Testament paints a pluriform picture in this regard (Bradshaw 2002:231; cf Pelsler 1987:557; Theißen & Merz 1996:70-71).

Smith (2003:286; see Bradshaw 2002:122; contra Duchesne 1904:49-55) points out that church historians have come to recognize the need to rethink the origins of the Eucharist.<sup>3</sup>

Previously it had been widely assumed in scholarship that a straight line could be drawn from the earliest Christian meals, perhaps even the last meal of Jesus, to the fourth-century Eucharist. This assumption must now be rethought. We can no longer draw such a line. The earliest evidence testifies to significant local variations in early Christian community meal practices. In addition, the change from communal meal to the fourth-century form of the Eucharist is too severe.

Scholarship investigating early Christian meal traditions tends to concentrate only on certain aspects when investigating the issue of the origins of the Eucharist.<sup>4</sup> In this regard Smith (2003:4) names the significant studies of Jeremias (1949) and Lietzmann (1967). He writes that although they appear to reach different conclusions, closer analysis reveals that they share similar perspectives. Jeremias identifies the Passover meal as the original setting of Jesus' Last Supper and therefore as the source for the orthodox form and theology of the Lord's Supper. Other scholars, like Bornkamm (1963:149), do not concur with this conclusion. Jeremias operates on the assumption that there is only one origin of the "Christian" Eucharist. This perspective has tended to dominate most

studies on its origins. This view, however, represents a retrojection onto the ancient sources of the form taken by the Eucharist in the later “orthodox” church. Lietzmann (1967) adopts a similar perspective. He begins with the later period and proceeds backwards to search for origins. He differs from Jeremias in that he makes no connection with Passover traditions and does not presuppose a single origin for the Eucharist. Instead, he posits two basic forms of the Eucharistic liturgy. He then traces these two forms back to two separate origins in the tradition of the “early church” (Lietzmann 1967:158-186). According to Smith (2003:4-5), neither Jeremias nor Lietzmann studies the ancient data in their own right and on their own terms, because they construct models for analyzing the ancient data based on the form of the Eucharist in the later church. Smith proposes a different theory for the development of the earliest Eucharist. He argues that the occurrence of meals in community settings and the symbolic value they bore comprised part of what he calls the “common banquet tradition”. “Early Christianity” was made up of varied groups, who adapted the common banquet tradition to their own situations (cf Neyrey 1991:364-365). Smith (2003:5) suggests:

This proposal fits the form of our data, which witnesses to a variety of ways in which early Christians practiced communal meals. The process eventually led to the collapsing of all these traditions into one orthodox form and liturgy. One would therefore expect to find a unified liturgy at the latter end of the process. In the early period, however, the liturgies of the church were just as diverse as were its other features.

Smith (2003:287) further indicates that a certain evolution took place (cf Duchesne 1909:385; Marxsen 1979:114):

The primary change from symposium to Eucharist is the evolution of the ritual from the dining table to the altar and from the social world of the banquet to that of church order. This change began to take place rather quickly, as documented in early Christian literature and supported by

archaeological evidence. It represented a transition from the social code of the banquet to another social code. The banquet tradition was carried on somewhat longer in the form of the *agape*, or fellowship meal. This ritual meal coexisted with the Eucharist for some time and tended to carry the traditions of the banquet. The Eucharist, on the other hand, soon lost its connection with banquet traditions. New Testament texts still maintain the connection, however, and provide a means for the church ever and again to reexamine its origins and renew its theology by recapturing and reconfiguring its own traditions.

As I mentioned in chapter 1, if we consider the background to the manner in which the earliest Jesus-followers worshipped, we can clearly perceive many influences, among which the Greco-Roman mystery religions and the Israelite tradition<sup>5</sup> stand out specifically (cf De Jonge 2001:227-228; Bradshaw 2002:21-46). Bradshaw (2002:22) explains that although “Judaism” as well as “early Christianity” were exclusivist in certain respects, neither of these religions existed in a vacuum, insulated from the language, images, and practices of the cultures and religions around them. Although this probably happened unconsciously, they were influenced by their contemporaries. The words and actions of their worship were shaped by the society in which they lived.

If one keeps the development of early Jesus-movements in mind, it is only logical that “Christianity” inherited many of its liturgical practices from “Judaism”. But we must remember that liturgical practices in the Israelite tradition were not fixed and uniform in the first century (cf Bradshaw 2002:23). Regarding meals in the Israelite tradition, Smith (2003:133; cf Soggin 2001) points out:

Meals held a special place in the social world of Second Temple Judaism. The religious calendar was marked by numerous feasts whose origins were traced to the very beginnings of Jewish tradition. The law or Torah included a number of dietary restrictions that marked off observant Jews from the rest of ancient society. Various Jewish groups who organized as

separate sects within Judaism tended to celebrate their separateness and cohesiveness by holding special meals together.

Smith (2003:134) also traces the Israelite meal tradition back to the Greco-Roman banquet tradition. He asserts that over a long period of Jewish history, beginning with the Second Temple period and extending into the early rabbinic period, meal traditions were strongly influenced by the Greco-Roman banquet tradition. The meal traditions in Israel are thus not a unique phenomenon. There were distinctive features in the Israelite tradition, but “the form taken by Jewish meals in the Greco-Roman period on any particular occasion or in any particular setting was that of the Greco-Roman banquet” (Smith 2003:171). In addition the literary tradition in Israel used to describe meals largely derived from the Greek symposium tradition (cf Mack 1988:116-117). Especially notable is the way in which meals functioned to define group identity within Israel. The dietary laws also represented a more precise way in which meals defined boundaries, and the messianic banquet represented a mythologization of the festive banquet that was part of the common banquet tradition (Smith 2003:171). Thus, Smith (2003:172) contends that:

Jewish meals of the Second Temple period are seen to be embedded in the Greco-Roman banquet tradition in form, ideology, and literary descriptions. Though there are some distinctive aspects to Jewish meal traditions, these are best interpreted as subdivisions of the general banquet tradition and often can be seen as variations of common aspects of that tradition.

In contrast to this view, Bradshaw (2002:71) argues that although recent studies (like this one by Smith)<sup>6</sup> indicate that the symposium could have been the model on which “Jewish” and “Christian” formal meal practices might have been based, it was probably not the only pattern which meals in the circles of Jesus-followers adopted during the first century.

The answers to two questions in particular could shed light on the origins of the earliest Eucharist, namely:

- Why did the early Jesus-followers meet at meals? Because that is what groups in the first-century world did. Jesus-movements simply followed a pattern found throughout their world.
- What kind of meal did the early followers of Jesus celebrate? They celebrated a meal based on the banquet model found commonly in their world<sup>7</sup> (Smith 2003:279; cf Mack 1988:115; Neyrey 1991:363-365).

The general form of meals in the first-century Mediterranean world is now considered.

### **5.2.3 Meals in the first-century Mediterranean world**

Since the Eucharist is a ceremonial *meal*, an understanding of the way in which meals were conducted in the first-century Mediterranean world – the historical context of this particular meal – could shed light on the origins and meaning of the earliest Eucharist.

Malina (1986:191) points out that as universal human behavior, “eating and drinking as well as non-eating<sup>8</sup> and non-drinking provide the raw, objective stuff that individual cultures or social systems might endow with meaning and feeling.” This “raw, objective stuff” forms part of human social experience and allows for the development of “‘natural’ symbols”<sup>9</sup> (see Douglas 1996:37-53). Although everyone eats meals daily, meals and table fellowship are highly complex social events. For this reason, Neyrey (1991:362) believes that the social sciences are particularly helpful in examining the available material concerning meals, food and table-fellowship. As natural symbols, consumption and non-consumption can bear both general and highly specific meanings. But the specific meanings that consumption and non-consumption might carry depend upon the manifold features of a given social system. In no society are people permitted to eat everything, everywhere, with everyone, and in all situations. The consumption of

food is governed by rules and usage which cut across each other at different levels of symbolization. Some anthropologists even speak of food as a “code”<sup>10</sup> which communicates a multi-layered message: “If food is treated as a code, the message it encodes will be found in the pattern of social relations being expressed. The message is about different degrees of hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and transactions across the boundaries....Food categories... encode social events” (Douglas 1972:61; 1975:249).

Thus, to Elliott (1991:388), beyond supplying nourishment, food and meals exhibit a variety of social capacities: “They can serve as boundary markers distinguishing types and groups of participants and consumers: men/women, adults/children, humans/gods/demons, kin/non-kin, upper/lower classes, insiders/outsideers.” Food and meals also comprise the media of social and economic exchange. “Like the exchange of women in marriage or of other gifts and services across group boundaries, the sharing of food and hospitality plays an important role in the maintaining or modifying of social relations” (Elliott 1991:388; cf Van Staden 1991:217).

Formal meals in the Mediterranean culture of the Hellenistic and Roman periods (the period encompassing the origin and early development of “Christianity”) usually took on a homogeneous form. For Smith (2003:2), “[a]lthough there were many minor differences in the meal customs as practiced in different regions and social groups, the evidence suggests that meals took similar forms and shared similar meanings and interpretations across a broad range of the ancient world” (Smith 2003:2; cf Mack 1988:81; Neyrey 1991:364-365).

When the earliest Jesus-followers gathered, they regularly ate a meal together<sup>11</sup> (see e.g., Ac 2:46). Smith (2003:1-2) remarks that in so doing “...they were no different from other religious people in their world: for when any group of people in the ancient Mediterranean world met for social or religious purposes, their gatherings tended to be centered on a common meal or banquet.” The meals



also tended to follow the same basic form, customs, and rules, regardless of the group, occasion or setting (cf Mack 1988:114-115). The banquet, the traditional evening meal, became the pattern for all formalized meals in the Mediterranean world, whether these meals were “sacred” or “secular”. There was a religious component to every secular meal and every “sacred” banquet was also a social occasion (cf Smith & Taussig 1990:21-22; De Jonge 2001:209). Hence, the banquet can be called a “social institution” in the Greco-Roman world. If we thus desire to know more about Greek philosophical banquets, or Israelite festival meals, or the community meals of early Jesus-followers, we may gain insight from a prior understanding of the larger phenomenon of the banquet as a social institution.

In the first-century Mediterranean world meals, therefore, represented a social code that expressed patterns of social relations, which we can call the ideology of the banquet. This can be perceived in the function of meals as defining groups and their values. Eating together implied that people shared common ideas, values and social status (cf Van Staden 1991:200). People paid close attention to who ate with whom (e.g., Mk 2:15-17), who sat where (e.g., Lk 14:7-11), what they ate and drank (e.g., Lk 7:33-34) and where (e.g., Mk 6:35-36), how the food was prepared (e.g., Jn 21:9), which utensils were used (e.g., Mk 7:4), when the meal took place (e.g., Mk 14:12; Jn 13:1), and what was discussed at table (e.g., Lk 22:24-38) (see Neyrey 1991:368; Pilch 1996c:95). The patterns of social relationships that comprise ancient banquet ideology can consequently be divided into the following categories (Smith & Taussig 1990:30-35; Smith 2003: 9-12; cf Neyrey 1991:364-368; Crossan 1994:68-69):

- *Social boundaries*: The defining of boundaries is central to the social code of banquets. Whom one dines with defines one’s placement in a larger set of social networks. The social code of the banquet represents a confirmation and ritualization of the boundaries that exist in a social institution.

- *Social bonding*: A meal creates a special tie among the diners; it defines boundaries between different groups. In the New Testament Jesus is defined as a “friend of tax collectors and sinners” (Mk 2:15-17) on the grounds of dining with them. “[S]hared table-fellowship implies that Jesus shares *their* world...” (Neyrey 1991:364).
- *Social obligation*: Because a meal created a special tie among the diners, it led in turn to an ethical obligation between them (1 Cor 11:17-22) (cf Elliott 2003:194).
- *Social stratification*: People who dined at a first-century table were always aware of their different social rankings. Even the act of reclining indicated rank, for this posture was reserved for free, male, citizens. Women, children and slaves had to sit when they ate. Social stratification was also visible in the practice of ranking the guests by their position at the table as well as by the quality or quantity of food a person was given. We perceive this for example in the placement of individuals according to their rank in the community at the communal meal of the Essenes at Qumran (1QS 2.11-22).
- *Social inclusivity*: Although the social rankings of the guests were assumed, there was also a sense of social inclusivity among them. Those who dined together were to be treated in the same fashion. One observes this in the Passover liturgy specification that the poor should also recline equally at table on this occasion and receive at least four cups of wine (M Pes 10.1).
- *Festive joy*: A proper banquet could be judged by how well it promoted festive joy.

- *Banquet entertainment*: The first-century banquet presupposed entertainment as part of the event. This could take the form of anything, like party games, dramatic presentations, music, or philosophical conversation.

We can observe examples of some of these characteristics in the New Testament. Douglas (1966:126-127) points out that in cultures where the external boundaries of the social system are understood as being under pressure, purity systems distinguishing between pure and polluted, or clean and unclean, food and persons, may develop as a social mechanism for strengthening weak moral or legal structures. Elliott (1991:389) argues that this was the case in the post-exilic Israelite tradition, especially in Pharisaic ideology. For the Pharisees, food and meals formed a mediating link between the temple with its altar and the private home and its table. According to Luke-Acts, this purity system, linked with the temple and legitimated in the Mosaic law and oral tradition of the Pharisees, constituted the system with which Jesus and his followers came into conflict.<sup>12</sup> Elliott (1991:390) says: “Within the Lucan narrative, a new food code replicates and supports a new social code, a code consonant with a new vision of an inclusive salvation and an inclusive community of the redeemed” (cf Neyrey 1991:361; Esler 1996:71-109). Elliott (1991:391) adds that in Luke-Acts (e.g., Ac 10:1-11:18), the pattern of domestic relations and the intimacy and solidarity it presumes, serves as the decisive model for the identity and ethos of the “Christian” community as a whole:

This form of community ordered around the roles, relationships and responsibilities of the household stands in stark contrast to the exploitative system of the Temple, and embodies an alternative vision of salvation based not on cultic purity but on the gift of divine mercy and its imitation in the family of faith.

The following features were characteristic of the Greco-Roman banquet:

- Although the *posture* was that of sitting in Homeric times, it later altered to one of reclining.
- The *time* of the banquet was in the evening (cf De Jonge 2001:209).
- *Invitations* were assumed to be a normal part of a formal banquet. They were communicated verbally or in writing and were usually sent out a few days in advance for a practical reason, namely to fill the quota of guests (Sir 13:9; Xen, *Sym* 1.2-7).
- Archeological discoveries have provided us with plans for typical *dining rooms* in the Greek and Roman world. Usually an individual would host a banquet in his house. In a normal Greek city various public buildings also offered banquet facilities, including temple complexes (1 Cor 8:10). Dining rooms were designed so that couches could be arranged around a central axis and diners could share tables and communicate easily with each other (cf De Jonge 2001:210). The same design was used for domestic, public, and religious settings.
- The Greeks customarily included two *courses* in their banquet – the part where the meal would be eaten (*deipnon*) followed by the drinking party (*symposion*).<sup>13</sup> Roman banquets consisted of the same two basic courses, but they also served appetizers at the beginning of the meal. During the Roman period, the Greeks also added appetizers (Athan 2.58b-60b).
- The *menu* at a banquet consisted of bread and various vegetables, with fish or meat when the meal was extravagant. Wine was usually drunk mixed. Common proportions were five parts of water to two of wine or three of water to one of wine (Athan 10.426d).

- The end of the first course and the beginning of the second were marked off by special *rituals*, beginning with the removal of the tables and the bringing in of the wine bowl for mixing the wine. The beginning of the symposium would then be marked by the offering of a libation to the gods and by other religious ceremonies, such as the singing of a hymn (Pl, *Symp* 176A). In the Israelite tradition there developed a traditional benediction over the wine (M Ber 6:1).
- The seating of the guests always took place according to their *social rank*. The symposium began with the selection of a presiding officer or “symposiarch”, who set the rules for the drinking party to follow. The person occupying the highest position at the table was the guest of honor, and the other diners would be arranged according to their rank to his<sup>14</sup> right (Lk 14:7-11; Plut, *QConv* 615D) (cf Neyrey 1991:364).
- The *host* was responsible for the guest list, the menu, the provision of a place for the banquet, as well as for the arrangement of the places the guests would occupy at the table (cf Van Staden 1991:218).
- It was customary for the household servant to *wash the feet* of the guests before they reclined (Lk 7:44; Pl, *Symp* 175A) (cf Van Staden 1991:220). *Washing the hands* before the meal was also a normal part of Greco-Roman banquet customs (Mk 7:3; M Hag 2:5).
- The symposium represented a time for extended leisurely drinking of wine accompanied by *entertainment* or philosophical discussions (Xen, *Sym* 9.2-7; Pl, *Symp* 176E; Sir 9:14-15; M Av 3.3; Ac 20:7). The standard entertainment was provided by a flute girl (see Smith & Taussig 1990:23-28; Smith 2003:20-38).

All of these aspects can be noticed in Paul's arguments in his letters – he refers to the power of the meal to create *social bonding* and define *social boundaries*. His arguments for social ethics within the community probably draw on banquet traditions of *social obligation* toward one's meal companions. He responds to issues of *social stratification* at the table but especially develops the theme of *social inclusiveness*. Paul utilizes many features from the rules of *banquet entertainment*, suggesting that worship took place at the community table (see Smith 2003:175). Van Staden (1991:216) considers that since Jesus frequently taught during the setting of a meal, a connection can be made between Jesus' table talk and the literary genre of the symposium, where table talk was a significant feature (cf Funk & The Jesus Seminar 1998:142).

If we read the Gospels in this light, according to Smith (2003:219-221) meals in these documents also consistently reflect the Greco-Roman banquet tradition. One example is that in the descriptions of meals that Jesus ate, the posture seems to be one of reclining. If one keeps the schema suggested in chapter 1 in mind, the different layers of the Jesus tradition may identify the way in which the banquet motif is functioning in the Gospels:

- At the “showing” level, the level where Jesus of Nazareth acted, there are two usages of the banquet commonly referred to in the literature. One is the banquet used as a motif within the preaching of Jesus, as, for example, in the parables (Mt 22:2//Lk 14:6) (cf Scott [1989] 1990:161-174). The other type is represented by a collection of references to meals hosted by or participated in by Jesus. These types of meal texts are usually presented as a kind of “parabolic action”, by means of which Jesus would proclaim a particular message (Mt 11:18-19//Lk 7:31-35; the Last Supper). To Smith (2003:220) the presentations of these meals in the Gospel tradition function as idealizations of Jesus as a hero. The extent to which the motif of Jesus at table accurately represents the historical Jesus is a complex issue. At least, Smith writes, this data testifies to a Jesus

who self-consciously chose a lifestyle that was positive toward the banquet table as compared to the ascetic lifestyle of John the Baptist (cf Mack 1988:80-83).

- At the “telling” level, commonly referred to as the “oral tradition”, in the period after Jesus’ death, Jesus’ followers told stories about him in the context of the fledgling communities. The banquet emerged as a useful motif for defining aspects of the hero, Jesus. During this period Jesus-groups were also centering many of their communal religious activities on meals, which gave special significance to the stories of Jesus at table. At this point in the tradition, the typification of Jesus as a table companion of “tax collectors and sinners” became a symbol for the identity of these groups.
- At the level of “re-enactment”, the earliest written materials utilized these already existing motifs in the tradition and expanded them, drawing especially upon the varied usages of the banquet motif in Greco-Roman literature. Smith (2003:220) avers that the Gospels continued this trend, so that the banquet became a stock literary motif to serve the theological interests of Gospel writers. In addition, references to meal traditions in the Gospels served to enhance the communal meals being practiced in their communities. Smith (2003:220) also remarks that the presentation of Jesus at table in the Gospels must be understood in relation to the overall plot of each Gospel. Each of the Gospel writers imagines the table where Jesus dined according to a particular idealized model, one that is consistent with the overall picture of Jesus presented in their particular stories. In addition, these idealized models can be seen to correlate with a plot motif used in each of the Gospels, the motif of irony. The story of Jesus told in the Gospels takes place on two levels: “On one level, the values are those of the ‘world’ that crucifies him. On the other level, the values are those of God, who ‘glorifies’ him. The same is true when Jesus

dines. What happens to a normal meal setting is actually a ‘parabolic’ presentation of a heavenly reality” (Smith 2003:220).

Therefore, contends Smith (2003:220-221), throughout the various layers of the Jesus tradition, we are dealing with especially complex materials in which social reality and narrative world are significantly intertwined. He adds that it is clear that social reality is being represented in these texts and that the texts are true to the values of their social world. The question is where that social reality is to be located and how it is to be defined; that is, whether we are dealing primarily with the social reality of the storyteller or whether we have access to the social reality of the characters in the story, notably the social reality of Jesus of Nazareth.

#### **5.2.4 Formulae of institution of the Eucharist**

A large number of scholars participate in the debate regarding the formulae of institution of the Eucharist and whether, or what part of, these words can be traced back to Jesus of Nazareth (see e.g., Theißen & Merz 1996:366-373). I mention this because of the importance of the scholarly debate, but, as Feld (1976:5-6) points out:

Ist die historische Frage, und das heißt hier konkret: die Frage nach dem Ursprung des Abendmahls im Leben Jesu selbst, historisch möglich und theologisch legitim, oder: historisch nicht zu lösen und theologisch illegitim, oder: historisch sehr wohl möglich, aber für kirchliche Theologie und Praxis belanglos?

Still, Pelser ([s a]c:2) notes that if we are looking for sources regarding the origins and meaning of the earliest Eucharist, the so-called “words of institution” will naturally play an important role, although these are not the only texts that we need to take into consideration.<sup>15</sup> These texts comprise Mark 14:22-24, Matthew 26:26-29, Luke 22:15-20 and 1 Corinthians 11:23-25<sup>16</sup> (cf Stevenson 1989:17; Meier 1995:340-344). Although there are no “words of institution” in the Gospel according to John, John 6:51-58 reminds us of the institution of the Eucharist.



Although these latter verses raise literary and historical-critical questions, they can be linked to the Eucharist, even if they represent only a later interpolation connected to the Eucharist (cf Meier 1995:343-344; De Jonge 2001:220-221; see Bornkamm 1968:60-67; 1971:51-64; Wilckens 1974:220-248; Hahn 1975:562). If we compare Mark and Matthew, it is clear that Matthew is dependent on Mark. Since Mark goes back to an earlier tradition and Matthew adds nothing new, Matthew can be omitted in this discussion (Conzelmann 1992:134). The tradition in Paul is richer than the one in Mark. After the words of interpretation one reads an *anamnesis*-command, regarding the bread as well as the cup. Paul views the Eucharist as a proclamation of Jesus' death, while, as in Mark (and Luke), he also adopts an "eschatological" perspective. The version in Luke exhibits similarities with Paul and Mark, as well as with another tradition. A second cup is mentioned, resulting in the order: cup-bread-cup. Text-critical problems exist regarding the version in Luke, namely whether the long or short version is the original. Although most scholars argue for the long version, there are others who select the shorter one (see Metzger [1971] 1975:173-177; Strack-Billerbeck 1924:256-258). Luke's version will also not form part of my discussion, since it relies strongly on Paul and does not really add more than what is already found in Mark and Paul (cf Marxsen 1979:92-93; Léon-Dufour 1987:96-98).

Pelser ([s a]d:52-53) lists the following differences between the institution of the Eucharist in Paul and Mark: Paul does not say that the institution of the Eucharist took place during the Passover festival, but on the night that Jesus was delivered. According to Paul the actions performed with the bread and cup must be done in memory of Christ, while Mark never mentions this. Differences also exist regarding the formulation of the words spoken over the cup (Pelser 1987:561; see Bornkamm 1963:161). It seems as if Mark perceived the body and blood of Christ as being spiritual food and drink for the believers at the Eucharist, while in Paul there is no mention of spiritual food and drink. He refers to two separate actions – what is done with the bread causes a person to share in the redemptive meaning of Christ's death, while the cup makes a person share in the

new redemptive era initiated by the death of Christ (Pelser 1987:561). Where Mark places *body* and *blood* parallel to each other, Paul places *body* and *covenant* parallel to each other. Paul regards participation in the Eucharist as a proclamation of the death of the Lord, until he comes. Past, present and future are thus combined in a single ceremony.

The first question that therefore needs to be answered is whether the tradition that we find in Paul (1 Cor 11:23-25) or the one that we find in Mark (14:22-24), is the oldest (see Pelser [s a]:146-147). Although the oldest tradition is not necessarily the most authentic tradition, at least it stands closest to the original event. Reading these two texts, the oldest written tradition is most probably the one in Paul (see Grosheide 1932:393-394). The Pauline tradition already possessed a set liturgical form at the time of the writing of 1 Corinthians (54/55 CE) (see Grosheide 1932:388-397; Kümmel 1974:220-222, 247-248, 252-253) or even before the origin of the congregation (49/50 CE) (see Kümmel 1974:112, 115; Conzelmann 1992:130-140). Furthermore, Paul probably made use of an already existing tradition (see Pelser [s a]:11-13). Meier (1995:340-341) concurs that the Pauline version is the earliest and he adds that it appears to be the most original, since the two parts of the narrative, the words over the bread and the words over the cup, are not gracefully paralleled as in other New Testament documents. In Mark and Matthew, for instance, we find: "This is my body...this is my blood". In Paul the "words of institution" are not balanced in their exact wording. But although Paul's is apparently the earliest version, this does not imply that it is the closest to the original event. Meier argues thus because there is no clause, "keep doing this in remembrance of me", in Mark, as in Paul, which suggests that in some respects the Markan tradition may be older than Paul's. Marxsen (1979:93-96) explains the Markan harmonization by commenting that the meal, which separated the two actions in the Pauline version, has disappeared. In his opinion the phrase *meta\ to\ deipnh=sai* ("after supper") in Paul indicates that the Lord's Supper was originally celebrated within the setting of a meal, while in Mark one only finds an abridged cultic meal-

celebration. Pelsner ([s a]a:149) comes to the conclusion that both traditions exhibit older and younger elements: we do not know whether they originally stem from the same tradition (contra De Jonge 2001:218), but we do know that we cannot possibly reconstruct this original tradition (cf Meier 1995:340-34).

Crossan's (1998:434; cf De Jonge 2001:221-223) explanation for the differences in the testimonies regarding the Last Supper is that the "common meal tradition" appears in twin but separate developments, as *Didache* 9-10 (from the Q tradition onwards till *Didache*) and as 1 Corinthians 10-11 (from the Jerusalem tradition onwards till Paul). In Crossan's view these two separate Eucharistic traditions are as old as we can trace the evidence. The difference between the two traditions comprises the following: One tradition, that in Paul and Mark, involves a ritual meal reported as being installed by Jesus himself and connected with his own execution. The bread and wine are separated from one another to symbolize the separation of Jesus' own body and blood by execution. The other tradition, that in *Didache* 9-10, contains none of these connections, and its prayers are very similar to standard prayers in the Israelite tradition. Both traditions show stages of development within themselves. Paul and Mark agree that it was a Last Supper, but Paul, unlike Mark, commands repetition for the purpose of remembrance, while Mark, unlike Paul, explicitly describes it as the Passover meal. The earlier *Didache* 10:3 speaks only about "food and drink", together, but the later *Didache* 9:2-3 separates, in this sequence, "the cup" and "the bread." Crossan considers these two traditions to be equally valid ritualizations of the meal tradition related to the historical Jesus.

Crossan (1998:434-444) identifies five elements of the common meal tradition that are common to both these traditions: they even predate both versions, indicating the earliest ritualization of the meal tradition related to the historical Jesus after his death.

These elements follow:

- *An actual meal*: By comparing the earlier and later versions of the two traditions mentioned above, Crossan reasons that the common meal tradition originally involved a full meal, ritualized precisely as such. Bread and wine should summarize, not substitute for, the Eucharist; otherwise, it is no longer the Lord's Supper.
- *A shared meal*: It was both an actual meal and a shared meal. There is an emphasis not just on bread but on *breaking* the bread, which is made symbolic of sharing by passing it around. The bread was broken and passed around. There is also an emphasis not just on the wine but rather on the *cup*. For Crossan this also constitutes a symbol of sharing, since the cup can be passed around.
- *Biblical Jesus*: Both developments connect the meal to Jesus himself, a Jesus who is embedded in the same scriptural background. Both traditions refer to Jesus in connection with the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53. Crossan makes this connection on the grounds of the "servant/child" in the *Didache* and "handed over" (by God) in the pre-Pauline tradition. This means that Jesus' death was explicitly present in 1 Corinthians 10-11 and implicitly in *Didache* 9-10.
- *Symbolic unity*: Crossan perceives an apocalyptic ingathering of the church now scattered across the world in the earlier and later version of the *Didache*. In his view Paul emphasized the bread as symbolic of future and present unity. Many grapes become one cup of wine. Many grains become one loaf of bread. The symbolism of many becoming one is inherent in the very ingredients of the meal itself – they serve to underline the unity of the shared meal.

- *Apocalyptic sanction:* The food of the Eucharist is holy because participants commit themselves to sharing together as the Father taught them through his servant Jesus. Apocalyptic consummation acts as a sanction against those who abuse the holy shared meal either from below (with the *Didache's* freeloaders) or from above (with the Corinthian patrons).

It is abundantly clear that many attempts have been made to reconstruct an original historical event underlying these differing texts. The presumption behind many of these reconstructions is that Jesus foresaw his death and provided an interpretation of its meaning by means of a creative use of benedictions over the bread and wine. But such presuppositions must be weighed against the assessment of Jesus as a human rather than a divine being. The tradition makes him a divine figure of whom such premonitions can be expected, but this cannot be applied to a historical figure. Although Jesus most probably knew that his life was being threatened, it is too much to expect that he knew exactly what would happen, then applied a meaning to it and finally ritualized it into a highly complex theological form. This also does not cohere with what tradition informs us about the history of the Jesus-group immediately after his death. Rather than witnessing a smooth transition for which Jesus' followers would be prepared, the tradition witnesses to a period of confusion and reassessment. This period produced the early theologizing about the meaning of the life and death of Jesus. The Eucharistic sayings present a rather advanced stage of this theologizing, since his death has been accorded a sophisticated and complex interpretation utilizing a variety of biblical and ritual motifs and symbols (Smith & Taussig 1990:40-41). Smith and Taussig (1990:41) write in this regard: "Consequently, it is highly unlikely that one could reconstruct a credible historical event based on the eucharistic sayings texts." They conclude that the tradition does not support the view that the Last Supper tradition derived from any hypothetical single original event, whether that event be located in the life of Jesus or in the life of the early church.

In a sense scholars thus arrive at to the following broad consensus: In 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 Paul quotes a meal tradition that has been conveyed to him, while a variation of the same tradition is found in Mark. Smith (2003:188-189; cf De Jonge 2001:215-217) posits the following theses regarding this text:

- He is of the opinion that *banquet ideology* lies behind this text, which he explains as follows: The meal pictured here possesses the following features of a normal Greco-Roman banquet:
  - benediction over the food, represented by the bread;
  - division of the meal into *deipnon* (mentioned in the text), followed by *symposion* (implied by the wine blessing);
  - and benediction over the wine, marking the transition from *deipnon* to *symposion*.
- Another feature that characterizes this text is that it is presented in the form of a *Jesus story*. The Gospels place it in a narrative recounting the life of Jesus. Here its narrative context is strictly “on the night that he was handed over” – the night he died. In contrast to the Gospels where Jesus is “betrayed”, here Jesus is “handed over” (*paredidoto*). In the light of Romans 8:32, Smith (2003:188) contends that the term “handed over” in 1 Corinthians does not refer to Judas’s betrayal, but to the theological concept of Jesus being handed over by God.
- The text is more likely to be *etiological* than historical in both form and content (cf Mack 1988:80, 120). In other words, it functions as a story that arose to explain a practice in the church. Smith (2003:188) argues that meals were already being eaten and given significance specific to the “Christian” context. This story is narrated to give particular meaning to the practice, drawing on an interpretation of Jesus’ death. To Smith, it is not clear *how* this interpretation developed in Paul.

- Smith (2003:189) writes that the *function* of this text at the communal meals of the earliest Jesus-followers remains unclear. It cannot be read as a script for liturgical action, unless one can imagine someone in the community acting out the part of Jesus in some kind of divine drama, which seems unlikely. But in some sense it was seen as a text defining the community meal.

Smith (2003:216-217) notes that the following aspects of the ideology of the banquet are utilized by Paul:

- The significance of the meal in creating *social bonding*. If the people to whom he is writing dine as one community, and thus symbolize that all are one before God, then they will thereby “proclaim the Lord’s death” (1 Cor 11:26), which is the means whereby such unity among human beings has been established by God.
- The tradition whereby a meal symbolized *social obligations* within the community. Here Paul utilized traditional arguments from Greco-Roman meal ethics to define the basis of community identity and social ethics.
- The dichotomy of social stratification versus *social equality* at the banquet. Paul argues that equality before God is to be realized in community life by means of a community meal shared in common and equally by all.

In conclusion, for Smith (2003:276-277; cf Mack 1988:80) the table of Jesus as sketched in the Gospels is a literary phenomenon, which suggests that the Last Supper functions simply as another Jesus story, without a clear indication that it constituted a model for a ritual activity in the life of the community any more than any other Jesus story did. On the other hand Smith acknowledges that it was highly likely that the Gospel communities did celebrate meals together and that those meals were significant moments for the formation of community identity.

These meals would have been to some extent reflective of the idealized model for meals presented in the story of the Last Supper.

### 5.2.5 The Eucharist and the paschal meal

The Passover feast was one of the major festivals in Israel. Smith (2003:147) says that it was primarily a sacrificial meal prior to the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, that required a pilgrimage to Jerusalem where the sacrifice was held. The most elaborate description of a Passover meal is found in the *seder* (“order”) in the Mishna. The earliest date for the completion of this *seder* is the second third of the second century, but it continued to be adapted for many centuries afterwards.

Whether or not the Last Supper was a Passover meal has been a topic of considerable debate (see Theißen & Merz 1996:373-376). Some scholars accept the claim of the Synoptic Gospels that it was a Passover meal,<sup>17</sup> and regard the different chronology of the Fourth Gospel (which situates the Supper on the day before the Passover) as an adjustment made by the Evangelist for a theological purpose – so that the death of Jesus would coincide with the very moment that the Passover lambs were being sacrificed in the temple. Others note that a number of details in the Synoptic versions do not cohere with the Passover explanation, and they prefer John’s chronology as being historical. Some have even attempted to harmonize the apparent contradiction (Bradshaw 2002:63).

According to the version of Mark, the Last Supper is a Passover meal (14:1-2; 14:12-16), but many scholars agree that Passover themes are not present in the actual description of the meal (Lietzmann 1967:211-213; see Jeremias 1949:10-15; Bornkamm 1963:149). Meier (1995:345) concurs that the Last Supper was probably not a Passover meal, and that the context of the Passover meal is that of a theological framework created by Mark and followed by Matthew and Luke (cf Pilch 1996c:94). To Smith (2003:249) the description focuses rather on the special ceremony connected with the eating of bread and the drinking of wine.



He adds that like any other narrative segment of Mark, this ceremony derives its primary meaning from the story world of Mark as a whole (cf Funk & The Jesus Seminar 1998:140-141). The words over the bread: "Take...this is my body" (Mk 14:22), can be explained as follows in the story of Mark: The term "body" apparently denotes a single meaning in Mark – it is the term for a corpse or a physical body that will become a corpse (Mk 5:29; 6:29; 14:8; 15:43). This point brings Smith (2003:250-251) to the conclusion that Jesus is referring to his death: "But it is not the efficacy of his death that is the referent, for it is not 'body' (*soma*) but 'life' (*psyche*) that is given as a 'ransom' (10:45). Rather, it is the manner of death that must be meant." Thus, the disciples' sharing of bread with Jesus means their uniting with him in discipleship and eventually sharing in his fate. A parallel attitude is developed in regard to the cup at the Last Supper. Discipleship is described as encompassing the taking up of a cross and following Jesus (Mk 8:34), and in another verse it is described in these terms: "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with" (Mk 10:39).<sup>18</sup> In both cases the reference is to the death of Jesus as being the death of a martyr. Thus, when Jesus prays in the garden on the evening of his death, he begs: "Take this cup from me" (Mk 14:36). Smith (2003:251) concludes, therefore, that when the cup is related to the "blood of the covenant" at the Last Supper and it is specifically said that "they all drank from it" (Mk 14:23-24), we must understand that it is the cup of martyrdom that they drank: "In the memory of the church, though not in the story world of Mark, that is exactly the fate that awaits the faithful disciples. Therefore, although Mark ends his story with the disciples having failed to 'follow' Jesus, he embeds in the Last Supper story the promise that, eventually, they will" (Smith 2003:251). This could be viewed as a clear example of anti-language, because drinking the cup that Jesus drank implies dying with him. But in the end, to *die* with Jesus means to gain *life*.

While Mark (and the other Synoptic Gospels) places this text in the context of a Passover celebration, for Paul it is also very important that Jesus instituted the Eucharist "on the night he was handed over" (ἐ0n τh=| νυκτι\ h[|

paredi/deto; 1 Cor 11:23). We do not know exactly what Paul had in mind by using these words, but he does not mention a Passover context (Pelser [s a]a:138; 1987:560; see Bornkamm 1971:149). The most important point for Paul appears to be that the Eucharist is not the same kind of cultic celebration as the timeless mysteries, but that it concerns something that took place in history, a history determined by God.<sup>19</sup>

If we take all the above arguments into consideration, it seems as if the Last Supper was probably not a Passover meal (cf Theißen & Merz 1996:376). Nevertheless, correlations exist between the earliest Eucharist and the Passover. For the House of Israel the Passover was a ceremony that celebrated redemption from foreign bondage. For the earliest Jesus-followers the Eucharist likewise constituted a ceremony that celebrated the participants' newly found "freedom" from oppression, as members of the family of God.

### **5.2.6 The Eucharist and the apocalyptic banquet**

Smith (2003:166) illustrates that an important metaphorical use of banquet ideology in Jewish thought is found in the tradition of the so-called messianic banquet. He remarks that this was a widespread motif found in various stages and forms of Jewish literature and that it made an important contribution to the banquet ideology of the Greco-Roman period. The term "messianic banquet",<sup>20</sup> according to Smith (2003:166), refers to the general symbolism of food and/or a festive meal to signify immortality and/or the joys of the end-time or afterlife. He points out that the terms "eschatological banquet" and "apocalyptic banquet" are often used in this more general sense. Smith (2003:166-167) adds that the messianic banquet motif is especially associated with apocalyptic traditions in Israel. But, like other apocalyptic motifs, the messianic banquet originates in a complex mythological heritage from the ancient Near East and is supplemented in the later periods by Hellenistic parallels: "One motif connected with the messianic banquet theme places the emphasis on the numinous quality of

certain symbolic foods. The characteristic theme here is that of the ‘food of the gods’, which confers immortality on anyone who eats it” (Smith 2003:167).

Prominent images include basic foods such as water, wine, bread, and fish. In the Greek tradition, wine is considered as the gift of the god Dionysus to mortals and its effects are viewed as the blessings of the god. This idea is echoed in some Jewish traditions as well. Bread is related to the miraculous bread from heaven – manna – and is also associated with the miraculous water from the rock (Ex 16:1-17:7; Nm 11:7-9; 20:2-13). Smith (2003:168) indicates that Paul interprets manna and water from the rock as “spiritual food” and “spiritual drink” and thus as symbolic of the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 10:1-13). The motif of the divine banquet comprises the primary messianic banquet motif, since it places the emphasis on the banquet itself, a banquet at which the Messiah is deemed to be present. Apparently, the roots of this theme can be discovered in another pattern of certain ancient Near Eastern creation myths: “These myths tell of a great battle being waged in the divine sphere. When the battle has been won, the gods assemble and celebrate the victory with a great banquet. Since apocalyptic literature takes up the combat and victory motif, the banquet of celebration becomes a part of its repertoire as well” (Smith 2003:168; see 1 Chr 12:38-40; Is 25:6-8).

The messianic banquet is sometimes represented as a wedding banquet, a motif that is closely related to the victory banquet in its mythological origins and its connections with the themes of victory and the kingship of the god. This brings to mind the concept of the “sacred marriage”, once again a concept with a rich heritage stemming from ancient Near Eastern myth and ritual. In biblical texts this theme is often used as a symbol for the relationship of God to the people of Israel, or, in the New Testament, as a symbol for the relationship of Christ with the church (Hs 2:1-22; Is 54:4-8; Ezk 16:7-8; 2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:23-32). In its role as a representation of the numinous, now being made available to humans, the messianic banquet is in its essence a mythological meal. It represents food and

beings stemming from a timeless, mythological world. Smith (2003:170-171) explains: "To the extent that reference is made to real people and real history, such references are by definition made mythological as well. Indeed, the texts in which messianic banquets are presented are by and large literary idealizations. They do not describe real meals, but rather idealize meals on a divine plain."

Smith (2003:284) further describes the messianic banquet as a tradition in which the joys of the end-time are symbolized as a great and bountiful banquet:

The central meaning of the symbol is that it is a time of festive joy, when the entire community of God gathers not in a temple, synagogue or church, for example, but in a greater banqueting hall and celebrates a great festive party with tables that overflow with food and wine. It is a symbol that lies behind each of the meal stories in the Jesus tradition. It provides the ideology of the numinous for early Christian meals, for it is when the community forms itself in anticipation of the messianic banquet that it experiences the presence of the divine.

The way in which the divine could be *experienced*, was by means of creating alternate states of consciousness.

According to Zizioulas (1985:29), in the first centuries the Eucharist was understood as the event that brought the dispersed people together in the same place, to constitute the eschatological messianic community in the here and now. Only baptized people possessed the right to be part of this community. He says that the Eucharist offered positively what baptism meant negatively, namely that the death of the old, biological identity was replaced by the birth of the new identity, which was given in the Eucharistic community. The old biological identity leads to death, because it is based on natural necessity. On the other hand, the new identity given in the Eucharist, which is based on free and undying relationships, offers eternal life. The church as the image of the eschatological community promised a foretaste of eternal life through the Eucharist, by providing

a set of relations that would accord the participants an internal identity and the experience of a life in which all natural (e.g., age, race, gender) and social (e.g., profession, social or economic status) divisions would be overcome by the unity of the body of Christ.

In relation to banquet imagery, Mark operates with an implicit model of the apocalyptic or messianic banquet. In an ironic way, in Mark, Jesus dines as a king. The other side of the ironic event, its “real” meaning in opposition to its apparent meaning, tends to exist in the realm of the apocalyptic (Smith 2003:240). In Mark, Jesus is almost always the host, and the meals that he hosts are viewed as being in contrast to the meals provided by his opponents. Unlike the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus dines with tax collectors and sinners (Mk 2:15-17) and with a leper (Mk 14:3). The critique that Jesus eats with “tax collectors and sinners” is also given prominence in the tradition which Luke inherits (Lk 7:34). But Luke expands this theme so that Jesus’ entire ministry in Luke is characterized as being to the poor, the captives, the blind, and the oppressed (e.g., Lk 4:18-19; 6:20-26; 7:22; 14:15-24) (Smith 2003:269).

In the world of Jesus outcasts are welcome at the table, and dietary laws are abolished. On the contrary, the banquets of Herod are sketched as contrasting with the banquet of Jesus – in this world Jesus is king, although in an ironic sense; in the other world Herod is king. The world of Jesus is placed on a different plane – it partakes of the realities of the apostolic age. It is the apocalyptic “Son of Man” who can break Sabbath and dietary laws (he is the “Lord of the Sabbath”). His disciples do not fast because they already partake in the new age; they have the bridegroom with them (Mk 2:19). Jesus in effect offers the messianic banquet to those he invites to his table (Smith 2003:241-242). The contrast between the two worlds is vivid and deliberate.

In the parable of the wedding feast or great banquet (Mt 22:1-14; Lk 14:16-24; GTh 64), we also perceive a relation to the messianic banquet. Scott (1990:172)

avers that the meal stands for the kingdom and that admittance to the meal defines those who are saved. If one keeps Isaiah 25:6-9 in mind this parable seems to be referring to the messianic banquet. Although the parable does not refer directly to the Isaiah text, in both these texts the oppressed are restored to honor by an all-powerful God. In Deuteronomy 20:5-7, the excuses for not going to war are enumerated, and this corresponds with the excuses the original guests utter in Luke's version of the story. Scott (1990:171) concludes, therefore, that at the discourse level, this is a banquet held before a holy war is to be waged. Both the banquet and excuses suggest that God's final vengeance is about to take place, yet the dinner never escalates to the expected messianic banquet, because the master is powerless to attack those who have snubbed him. Scott (1990:173) writes:

In this village there is no upward mobility, for the master loses his upper-class status and must join those who live in the streets. In a dyadic culture, self-worth or -value is determined by significant others. In the passage from Isaiah, the poor and distressed receive new value from being associated with God: God raises such people to high status by destroying their enemies. In the parable, the householder cannot raise the poor up but must himself join them.

Schnackenburg (1981:40-41; cf Käseman 1969:89) concurs that an "eschatological" outlook is evident in the earliest Eucharist – it already bore a character of "eschatological fulfillment". He comments: "The central act of worship of the early Church testifies to its characteristic eschatological awareness of already having experienced the happiness of the time of salvation, and yet of still looking forward to the 'restoration of all things' at the Parousia.... (cf. Acts 3:20f.)" (Schnackenburg 1981:41).

One last aspect needs to be considered here; it is explained by Marxsen (1979:111). In his view, we need to understand the way in which Israelites understood *time* in order to appreciate the meaning of the Eucharist. He points

out that Israelites think historically, in that the *eschaton* becomes for them a present reality by representation or anticipation (see chapter 1). We can observe this in the Passover (cf Soggin 2001:87-91):

In the Passover ritual every generation is told to celebrate the festival as if it had itself come out of Egypt. The Exodus of the past is celebrated today. This has nothing at all to do with our modern memorial celebrations; it is a co-celebrating (*mitfeiern*), at which there is a “repeating” of that event so as to bring the past into the present. Among other ways, this comes out very clearly in the effort to make the “repetition” of the celebration imitate as much as possible the original event. The past is “re-presented.” Correspondingly, the future is anticipated, perhaps in a meal, in concepts and representation of the Feast of Tabernacles, etc.

This manner of experiencing time was characteristic of the earliest Jesus-followers. By means of re-presentation they celebrated the previous table fellowships with Jesus and at the same time during them anticipated their consummation as the community of the new, the “eschatological”, covenant. But since the Eucharist was also influenced by the Hellenistic world, Hellenistic aspects likewise played a role. For instance, here the *eschaton* is not important, but the “divine” is. And this “divine” was imparted by material means. This is clear in the Corinthians’ attempt to celebrate a meal according to Israelite customs. At the end of the social meal, they held an abbreviated meal-celebration. Customs at meals, usual in the Corinthians’ world, also entered in. Apparently, eating bread and drinking wine were understood as the reception of sacramental elements. Marxsen (1979:112) argues that the slow emergence of the emphasis on the elements and their significance represents a Hellenistic interpretation of the original Palestinian meal. Marxsen (1979:114) adds that after Paul and Mark, the “eschatological” community became the *cultic* community: “Soon, the food is no longer partaken of at a table but received at an altar which one must approach. Hand in hand with this, the development of the notion of ‘office’

occurs. One can even take the food (as holy food) to the sick who could not be present at the church service.” The logical development is thus clearly evident – “the action is asserted, then the action is reflected on, finally he who performs the action is, upon reflection, given explication” (Marxsen 1979:114). Marxsen (1979:115) continues:

At the beginning stood the meal as an eschatological event. The meal is interpreted at two points. Then these two points are lifted out of the entire meal complex. The interpretation goes on but is now related only to what happened at these two points – consuming bread and wine. Finally, the bread and wine are themselves interpreted; and this interpretation is expanded christologically.

### **5.2.7 The “foundation” of the Eucharist in the last meal of Jesus with his disciples and the other meals of Jesus**

Did Jesus of Nazareth establish the Eucharist? This question has been posed over many years by different scholars (see e.g., Feld 1976:4-39; Lohmeyer 1937:204-223; 1938:92-94; Lietzmann 1967; Bultmann 1984:152-153). Bradshaw (2002:61-62) observes that one of the major difficulties faced by scholars with regard to the origins of the Eucharist is the question regarding to what extent the accounts of the Last Supper in the New Testament (Mt 26:17-30; Mk 14:12-26; Lk 22:7-38; 1 Cor 11:23-6) can be treated as reliable descriptions of an actual historical event and how far they have been affected by the later liturgical practices of the first generation of “Christians”. From Bultmann (1984:144-151) onwards, a number of scholars have argued that, while Jesus may have held a final meal with his disciples, the narratives as we have them are creations of the “early church” and do not tell us anything about the actual historical roots of the Eucharist. These records only bear witness to its later development. On the other hand, other scholars would accept that the accounts have been influenced by the liturgical practices of the “early Christians”, but maintain that they contain a firm historical core<sup>21</sup> (see Marxsen 1979:92; Léon-Dufour 1987:85; Meier 1995:335-351).



Theißen (1999:130) states that Jesus' "Last Supper" was preceded by other communal meals which contained a symbolic surplus of meaning, and that there is a possibility that at his Last Supper Jesus made a connection between his death and the supper. We see this in the "words of institution". But the reference to Jesus' death could have been created after Easter (on the basis of his execution which had taken place in the meantime) (see *Did* 9 & 10, where no reference to Jesus' death has been preserved; and the Gospel of John, where the foot-washing has replaced the Eucharist and where at the Last Supper there is no interpretation of the elements in terms of the death of Jesus – although John knows of this concept). This link can also be perceived in the Pauline variant of the words of institution, where the Last Supper is associated with the promise of the new covenant, which has nothing to do with sacrifices (Theißen 1999:130).

Funk and the Jesus Seminar (1998:141-142) contribute to this discussion by concluding that the Last Supper as depicted in Mark 14:22-26 was probably not an historical event. On the other hand, they acknowledge that since Jesus ate frequently with his followers,<sup>22</sup> there must have been a last meal with them. Crossan (1992:360-367) agrees that Jesus and the people closest to him would have had a last supper, that is, a meal that later and in retrospect was recognized as having been their last one together. He comments: "That is all that happened before the death of Jesus. I do not presume any distinctive meal known beforehand, designated specifically, or ritually programmed as final and forever" (Crossan 1992:361). Crossan (1994:178) further points out that if Jesus himself had ritualized a meal in which he identified bread and wine with his body and blood, it would be difficult to explain the absence of such symbolization in Eucharistic texts like *Didache* 9-10. This leads Crossan (1994:178-179) to conclude that it was open commensality during Jesus' life, rather than the Last Supper before his death, that was the root of any later ritualization.<sup>23</sup>

Crossan (1994:68) defines the word “commensality” as “the rules of tabling and eating as miniature models for the rules of association and socialization”, from the Latin word *mensa* which means table. According to him commensality refers to table fellowship as a map of economic discrimination, social hierarchy, and political differentiation. Crossan (1994:66-69; cf Scott 1990:161; Van Bruggen 1994:388-392) refers to the parable in Matthew 22:1-13, Luke 14:15-24 and in the *Gospel of Thomas* 64, in which a person hosts a feast, sends a servant to invite his friends, all the friends make excuses, and then the host replaces the absent guests with *anyone from the street*. This could lead to a situation in which classes, genders, and ranks could be mingled – anyone could be reclining next to anyone else. This, according to Crossan (1994:69), is open commensality – “an eating together without using table as a miniature map of society’s vertical discriminations and lateral separations.” Since Jesus lived out this parable, he was called a glutton, drunkard, friend of tax collectors and sinners (Mk 2:18-20; Mt 11:18-19; Lk 7:33-34). This suggests that Jesus did not make “appropriate” distinctions and discriminations. Hence, Crossan (1994:70) arrives at the following conclusion: “The kingdom of God as a process of open commensality, of a nondiscriminating table depicting in miniature a nondiscriminating society, clashes fundamentally with honor and shame, those basic values of ancient Mediterranean culture and society.” For Jesus’ contemporaries, with their group-centered personalities, the “idea of eating together and living together without any distinctions, differences, discriminations, or hierarchies is close to the irrational and absurd. And the one who advocates or does it is close to the deviant and the perverted. He has no honor. He has no shame” (Crossan 1994:70; cf Van Staden 1991:224-229).

In contrast to the Qumran community (1QS 6:4-5; 1QS 2), where the emphasis is placed on hierarchy, precedence, and the order of dignity, a very different emphasis appears in Jesus’ commensality.

Crossan (1992:403, emphasis by Crossan) describes this as follows:

The four key verbs of *take, bless, broke, gave* from Mark 6:41 reappear at the Last Supper in Mark 14:22; similarly, the four verbs of *take, blessed, broke, gave* from the Last Supper in Luke 22:19 reappear as *take, blessed, broke, gave* in Luke 24:30; and the expression “took...given thanks...distributed...also the fish” from John 6:11, within a eucharistic context underlined by 6:53-58, reappears as “took...gave...so with the fish” in John 21:13.

Verbs such as *took, blessed, broke, gave* possess, therefore, profound symbolic connotations and may well stem, according to Crossan (1992:404; 1994:180-181), from that inaugural open commensality itself. They indicate a process of *equal sharing*, but imply even more than this. The first two verbs, *took* and *blessed*, are actions of the master, while the last two, *broke* and *gave*, represent actions of the servant. Jesus, master and host, performs instead the role of servant, and all share the same food as equals (since, as mentioned earlier, in Greco-Roman times more important guests were given better food and wine). Crossan (1992:402) considers that most of Jesus’ disciples would know about being served at table by slaves, but would not have experienced this. His male followers would also think of females merely as those who prepare and serve the family’s food. Jesus thus not only took on a role as servant, but also as female. Within the framework of the present study, this is a very clear example of Jesus “showing” what the implications of living in the “kingdom of God” are. The earliest Jesus followers “told” others about this, which resulted in the earliest church “re-enacting” Jesus’ open commensality in the Eucharist.

Schweitzer (1982:50) focuses on another facet of this issue. He asks what the motives could have been which led the first congregation to observe a celebration like the Eucharist, which is associated with Jesus’ last meal. Were they the result of arbitrariness or necessity? In the earliest celebration of the Lord’s Supper a double aspect lies hidden. A common meal is repeated. In doing

so, a historical moment, unique in itself, is in some manner supposed to be reproduced. What is the relationship between the repeated “Lord’s Meal” and the common religious meals of the earliest Jesus-groups?

Lietzmann (1967:249-255; see Richardson 1979:693-697) developed a theory that two different types of Eucharistic liturgy were performed by the earliest Jesus-groups.<sup>24</sup> One was the joyful fellowship meal of the early Jewish-Christian communities, the “breaking of bread” as in Acts 2:42; the other arose within the Pauline churches and was dominated by the theme of being a memorial of the death of Christ. Lietzmann argues that the former type comprised a continuation of the meals shared by the disciples with Jesus during his earthly ministry and was not related to the Last Supper; it contained no narrative of institution, did not involve the use of wine, and exhibited a strong eschatological dimension, being the anticipation of the messianic banquet. The second type arose from Paul’s belief that Jesus intended the Last Supper to be repeated as a liturgical rite (“Do this in remembrance of me” – found only in 1 Cor 11:24, 25 and Lk 22:19); it was characterized by Hellenistic sacrificial concepts and eventually supplanted the former type everywhere. Several other scholars adopted variations of this thesis (e.g., Lohmeyer 1937:168-227; 1938:81-99; Cullmann 1958:5-23). But the majority of scholars rejected Lietzmann’s (1967) theory of a dual origin of the Eucharist as being based on extremely tenuous evidence and as making the improbable assumption of a radical dichotomy between the thinking and practice of the early Jerusalem church and the Pauline communities (Pelser [s a]:9; Bradshaw 2002:65-66). However Bradshaw (2002:67) remarks that “...there seemed to be a general consensus that in the earliest period of the Church’s existence it was the eschatological theme which dominated eucharistic practice, but that it became combined with the remembrance of the death of Christ in the early Palestinian tradition.”

Although some scholars continue to pursue variations of the concept of the dual origin, two other principal trends can be seen in more recent New Testament

scholarship. One is to discuss the Last Supper within the context of the significance of human meals in general and of the cultural background of Greco-Roman practice in particular, and especially the pattern of the *symposion*, where the drinking of wine followed the meal. The other is to locate the roots of the Eucharist more broadly within the context of other meals in Jesus' life and not merely the Last Supper, and, largely following the trajectory established by redaction-criticism, to take seriously various layers of meaning that can be discerned within the New Testament, and the different ways in which that the individual New Testament writers describe those meals. In this regard, (Bradshaw 2002:68) comments:

Whereas earlier generations of scholars were concerned to find the common core behind the variety, scholars today tend to be more interested in what the variety says about the particular theologies of the Eucharist which were espoused by the individual writers and their communities, even if they cannot always agree on the specific layers of meaning that exist in the New Testament texts or on the special emphasis being given to the material by a writer.

Bradshaw (2002:70) concludes that, in the light of the general pluriformity of primitive Christianity, early Eucharistic meals may have varied not only in theological emphases between the different traditions, but also in the very form of the meal itself. We cannot easily dispose of these variations by consigning those that do not fit our ideal to the supposed category of an *agape* rather than an Eucharist, since the evidence will not allow us to divide the practices of the earliest Jesus-followers neatly in this way – for some communities, *agape* was the name given to their Eucharistic meal. Moreover, while in some places the Eucharistic action proper may have become detached from the meal at an early stage, in others the two may have remained united for much longer than is often supposed.

Perrin (1967:102-108) also views the tradition that Jesus offered table fellowship to outcasts as historical (Mt 11:16-19).<sup>25</sup> He considers that Jesus' table fellowship utilized the symbolism of the messianic banquet, as defined in Matthew 8:11. He perceives these texts as authentic to the historical Jesus, because they represent perspectives more appropriate to Jesus' setting than to that of the "early church". Perrin indicates that Jesus' table fellowship explains how he came to die: his actions defiled the boundaries of the community and thus functioned as an act of such offensiveness to Israelite sensibilities that the leaders of Israel called for his death. He asserts that this also explains how the earliest Jesus-groups came to eat a communal meal together; a practice that came into existence so early that it must have been a continuation of the practice of Jesus himself.

Perrin (1967:104-105) adds that the practice of communal meals amongst the earliest Jesus-followers existed long before there was a specific "Christian" theology to accord it meaning. In his opinion we cannot argue that the meals are an echo of the "Last Supper" held by Jesus with his disciples during the Passion, because, even if such an occasion as is reported in the Gospels is historical, it did not, in itself, give rise to the "early Christian" practice. All of our evidence indicates that the kind of theological emphasis associated with the "Last Supper" in the Gospels was by no means the major emphasis in the communal meals of the earliest Jesus-followers. He concurs with my earlier indication that these early communal meals also did not originate in the religious practice of ancient Israel, the reason being that the Passover meal was a yearly affair. The Qumran communal meal anticipating the "messianic banquet" could also not have constituted the origin of the communal meals among the earliest Jesus-followers, because this was simply a special significance accorded to the regular communal meal at Qumran. The earliest Eucharist was something out of the ordinary which the earliest followers of Jesus enacted and which helped to give them a special identity. The most reasonable explanation is thus that the communal meals of the earliest Jesus-followers are a continuation of a regular practice of the ministry of Jesus.

Perrin (1967:107-108) describes this point as follows:

The central feature of the message of Jesus is...the challenge of the forgiveness of sins and the offer of the possibility of a new kind of relationship with God and with one's fellow man. This was symbolized by a table-fellowship which celebrated the present joy and anticipated the future consummation....In all probability, it was the vividness of the memory of that pre-Easter fellowship between the disciples and the earthly Jesus that provided the pattern for the development of that remarkable sense of fellowship between the early Christians and the risen Lord which is such a feature of primitive Christianity – and which has such an effect on the Jesus tradition. At all events, we are justified in seeing this table-fellowship as the central feature of the ministry of Jesus; an anticipatory sitting at table in the Kingdom of God and a very real celebration of present joy and challenge.

Theißen (1999:124) likewise holds that the “[E]ucharist came into being from the meals that Jesus held. In remembrance of the last supper it is related to the death of Jesus. And this death of Jesus in turn takes the place of the ancient sacrifices.” In other words, Theißen’s (1999:126; cf Hooker 1997) thesis is that the Eucharist originated from the prophetic symbolic action with which Jesus delivered his “eschatological” message (in opposition to the traditional rites). Only by its reference to the death of Jesus could this symbolic action become an early “Christian” sacrament, because this reference gave it the power to supersede the traditional sacrifices.<sup>26</sup>

Theißen (1999:124) understands sacrifice<sup>27</sup> as a symbolic depiction of the fact that life is lived at the expense of other life – a person’s own life can be safeguarded and enriched by the surrender or destruction of another life. In “early Christianity” we can see a shift taking place here: The replacement of the many sacrifices by the one sacrifice of Christ “could mean that the enhancement of life does not just take place through the surrender of other life and at the cost

of other life; gain in life can also come about through the offering of one's own life in favour of other life" (Theißen 1999:125).

The one sacrifice of Jesus (which replaces the many sacrifices) was originally a unique martyrdom. At a secondary stage it was connected with repeated ceremonial processes. Then subsequently a symbolic action exhibiting an eschatological orientation came into being: an ordinary meal became a forerunner of the "eschatological meal", in memory of the death of Jesus (Theißen 1999:125-126).

This argument concludes the present section on the origin of the earliest Eucharist. It is argued that the foundation of this ceremony can therefore be found in the symbolic meals Jesus of Nazareth shared with other people ("showing"). Jesus had an alternative view of the world, which he displayed by means of inclusive meals, in which anyone could share, here and now. But to be a part of this world of Jesus, which can be termed the "kingdom of God", while at the same time still living in the ordinary world, called for alternate states of consciousness. In the next section the "telling" of the earliest Jesus followers will be described.

### **5.3 VALUE: EUCHARISTIC FORMULAE AS ANTI-LANGUAGE**

#### **5.3.1 Introduction**

In chapter 1, I proposed that, like baptism, the ritualization of the earliest Eucharist is a verbalization, in anti-language, of an alternate state of consciousness. In this section, I shall examine Eucharistic formulae in the New Testament and other early Christian literature, in order to show that anti-language is recognizable in what was said around the Eucharistic table. To say that you eat the body of Christ and drink the blood of Christ, while in practice you are eating bread and drinking wine, is nothing else than making use of the rich symbolism of anti-language. I shall also undertake a cursory examination of



similarities between the earliest Eucharist and the Greco-Roman mystery religions, since this should help to highlight the role which alternate states of consciousness, as expressed in anti-language, played in the earliest Eucharist. In other words, this section of the chapter will be devoted to the earliest Jesus-followers' "telling". They started to "tell" other people what Jesus "showed" in his meals, because it added *value* to their lives.

Before I begin, a few preliminary remarks regarding the elements of the Eucharist may shed light on the later discussion. The Eucharist does not contain complicated liturgical aesthetics as established rites do (Theißen 1999:127). Everyday happenings are given symbolic content. There is an iconic relationship between everyday performance and the symbolic sense – it is easy to see why an earthly meal can anticipate the eschatological joy at the banquet in the end-time (Theißen 1999:27). Smith (2003:190) agrees that the choice of bread and wine as elements to be interpreted is not remarkable in itself. In the Greco-Roman banquet tradition, bread represented the food of the *deipnon*, and wine the drink of the *symposion*. The question is: Why did the earliest Jesus-followers identify the bread and wine with the death of Jesus?

Theißen's (1999:132) answer to this question lies in the association of symbolic actions with the death of Jesus. For him, these symbolic actions cross taboo thresholds in a form that is protected by the rite. This does not occur through the external performance of the actions (because eating and drinking are harmless), but in the religious imagination that is associated with them. In the narrative of the Eucharist a crucified man's death is represented ritually. In this (although it is only in the imagination) an inhibition regarding human sacrifice is touched upon. The death of Jesus on the cross was not a ritual sacrifice, and in the Eucharistic ceremony no killing takes place, but by means of the association of the death of Jesus with the Eucharist a unique martyrdom<sup>28</sup> became the foundation of a rite that could be repeated.

But the association of bread and wine with the body and blood of Christ touches upon an even bigger taboo in the Israelite tradition – the prohibition against consuming blood. In Genesis 9:4-6 we read that blood was regarded as the seat of life. In the way they slaughtered animals, Israelites avoided the consumption of blood and thus showed that they respected the life in the animals they slaughtered. The invitation to drink blood, even if it was only in a symbolic way, would necessarily have been an abomination to any Israelite. Although the Eucharist could be perceived as symbolic cannibalism (something that was taboo for both Israelites and non-Israelites), the Eucharist was nevertheless established precisely by these anti-moral interpretations. Theißen (1999:133) argues that the “...barbarism in the rite which is allowed in the imagination is a contribution towards overcoming the barbarism in everyday life, addressing the anti-social impulses, grasping them, and transforming them into pro-social motivation. They are worked on and transformed in the ritual.”

According to Paul (1 Cor 11:27) the Eucharist could potentially symbolize a “crime”. He proclaims that if anyone eats the bread or drinks from the cup of the Lord in an “unworthy manner”, he or she will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. In other words, if the Eucharist becomes an occasion for acting out social differences, it becomes a crime. Then it is as if the people who partake in the Eucharist had killed Jesus themselves. “It is only its ritual shaping in the sense of Christian faith and Christian ethics that transforms this potential crime into a sacrament which conveys salvation” (Theißen 1999:133).

What implications emerge? Making use of the dogmatic patterns of explanation in traditional theology, Theißen (1999:135) contends that a sacrament communicates salvation by creating a non-verbal language (through the combination of word and element), which, if it is heard and accepted in faith, can change people. The “re-enactment” of Jesus’ inclusive meals *changed* the members of the earliest Jesus-groups.

Theißen (1999:135) notes a drifting apart of the elements and the words that accompany them:

What happens with the elements, with...bread and wine, is an everyday, undramatic event without any violence. By comparison with the ritual sacrifices of antiquity there is a consistent reduction of violence here. But what is added by the word as the inner meaning of this event represents an extraordinary increase in imagined violence: ...the [E]ucharist is based on the killing of another human being. In my view the effectiveness of the sacrament...is grounded in precisely this tension.

In referring to the death of Jesus, the new rite lost its visible or “iconic” character. Earthly food can easily be understood as an image of the heavenly meal. In contrast to this, the Eucharist exhibited an aniconic character. For Theißen (1999:131) there exists a “pictorial analogy between the earthly meal and the heavenly meal; however, there is none between the consumption of bread and wine and the crucifixion of Jesus”. Bread is not flesh. When “this is my body” is said, there is a semantic tension between the signifier and the signified. Therefore, the words can only be meant in a metaphorical sense. The same can be said of the wine. The link to the significance of the ritual is made by the religious imagination – by remembering Jesus’ Last Supper and the passion. In this regard, Theißen (1999:132) points out: “The passion is present through words and through the imaginative power of faith. Word and faith bridge the drifting apart of signifier and signified.”

Jesus kept on “showing”, even in his crucifixion. The “telling” of this “showing” required anti-language, because, as Theißen described, that which is said possesses a much deeper meaning than is observable on the surface.

### 5.3.2 Eucharistic formulae in the New Testament

A close look at Eucharistic formulae in the New Testament should make the use of anti-language apparent. The texts I refer to in these two sections only serve as illustrations; I do not intend to provide a comprehensive overview of all the available Eucharistic texts.

The first example comprises the miraculous multiplication of loaves (Mk 6:30-44//Mt 14:13-21//Lk 9:10-17//Jh 6:1-14; Mk 8:1-10//Mt 15:32-39). Van Aarde (1994a:195) considers that this narrative does not report a “miracle” as such. Like the parallel to this narrative in the Old Testament regarding manna from heaven (cf Dt 8:3 in respect of the Exodus from Egypt/the celebration of the Passover), the story recounting the multiplication of bread was interpreted within the framework of the tradition of the Last Supper by the earliest Jesus-followers (cf Gerhardsson 1979:56). Van Iersel (1964/65:189-190) argues that the theme of the “theological meal” is present in this narrative, but that Mark is more concerned with the “equality” of Israelites and Gentiles around the table of the Lord. Van Aarde (1994a:197, emphasis by Van Aarde) concurs with this (cf Neyrey 1991:380):

[T]his also becomes clear in the topographical progression from the *particular* focus on *five thousand* (Jewish) men on the *western side of the Sea of Galilee across from Bethsaida* (Mk 6:45) to the *universal* focus on *four thousand* (Gentile) men in the *region of Decapolis* (Mk 7:31). This progression from a particular focus to a universal one could also be indicated by the *number* of baskets in each instance that were filled with leftovers, namely *twelve* as opposed to *seven*....The report that it was the disciples (with a particular focus) that took the initiative in the first part of the double narrative, while it was Jesus (with a universal focus) that did this in the second, is thus more clearly defined.

In the opinion of Van Iersel (1964/65:180-181) the *Sitz im Leben* of the narrative is the catechesis of the “early church” – in particular within the framework of the

Last Supper tradition which had not yet been separated from ordinary meals (see Gerhardsson 1979:57). The catechesis element is especially noticeable in Mark 6:34 and 8:17-21. Thus, the narrative of the multiplication of loaves, from the point of view of a form critic, can be described as a “catechesis of communion”. The *Sitz im Leben* is the *communion* (Mk 6:41; 8:6) and the *whole congregation* partaking in the *communion table* (Mk 6:42a), what also concerns the *intermediary function of officials* at the celebration of the communion (Van Iersel 1964/65:182). From the *traditionsgeschichtliche* viewpoint, the narrative probably originated in “Judeo-Christian” and “Gentile-Christian” tradition circles: In the “Judeo-Christian” tradition the miraculous element is scaled down by the integration of the themes of both shepherd and communion. In the “Gentile-Christian” tradition it is related even more closely to the celebration of communion in which Hellenists, like Israelites, took part (Van Iersel 1964/65:189-190). Anti-language can be perceived in the disciples’ misconception that there is not enough bread to feed everyone – Jesus made sure that every single person could be fed. In the family of God no-one has to be sent away or remain hungry.

A second example narrates the story of the walk to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-32), although scholarly debate exists regarding whether this passage must be understood in the context of the Eucharist (see Grundmann 1971:442-448; Schmithals 1980:234-235; Moessner 1989:178; Nolland 1993:1206). According to Crossan (1994:170-174), this story signifies that the “presence and empowerment of Jesus remain in the community as it studies the scriptures ‘about’ him and shares a meal of bread and fish together” (Crossan 1994:172). For Stevenson (1989:45) the seeds of every Eucharist are contained in this story. The two disciples walk on the road – the “way” is a codeword for the new religion. This once again constitutes an example of anti-language. They are intent upon the Scriptures, but cannot understand them without receiving an explanation, which only Christ can give. The mysterious stranger comes upon the scene to fulfill this function. As the walk ends, Jesus starts to leave, but they ask him to stay behind and break bread with them. At the point where he breaks the bread

(a traditional practice for Israelites at home), they recognize him at last. Stevenson (1989:45-46) considers that the two parts of this story (the walk, together with the Scriptures and the meal at the table) correspond to the two essential ingredients of every Eucharist. The first part<sup>29</sup> is focused on the reading of Scripture followed by a sermon and prayers. The second part leads to the preparation of the table, the thanksgiving, and the sharing of the bread and wine.

A third example is that of the meal described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 (the story of the “Last Supper”), which evokes several banquet models (Smith 2003:189). It contains overtones of the funerary banquet, in which friends and family would gather to commemorate the death of a loved one. But such events were normally held only once a year, on the deceased’s birthday, and not as frequently as this which leads Smith (2003:189) to the conclusion that the funerary meal tradition lent credence to the event, for the participants, but that it was not the sole model for the meal. A variation of the funerary meal was the memorial meal. According to Smith (2003:189) this seems to be the significance of the phrase: “Do this in remembrance of me”. The closest parallel is the memorial meal of the Epicureans, to which an etiological tradition was also connected to it. Epicurus is said to have founded this meal in his own honor just before his death, as with Jesus in this text. Smith (2003:189) remarks that *what* is to be remembered is vaguely described. In Paul one does not read a narrative of the life of Jesus as in the Gospels, which would fit in here. The Christ story for Paul operated on a mythical level. For Smith the phrase “Christ crucified” virtually summarizes the entire plot. To Paul it represented a negotiation between Jesus and God – no human actors played any part in this drama. The Lord’s Supper that Paul presents is pictured as a meal of the “Lord Jesus” (cf Mack 1988:116). This phrase removes the text from any historical occurrences, because to call Jesus *ku/rioj* (“Lord”) in the way Paul understood this term was to place him within the realm of the divine. This leads Smith (2003:189) to conclude that the meal being pictured here takes place on a mythological level, borrowing by

implication the motif of the messianic banquet, a meal that takes place in the heavenly sphere.

In addition, the language of the covenant adds another dimension to the tradition, for it is not in itself inherent to either the martyr or the memorial meal traditions. Smith (2003:190; cf Mack 1988:118) observes that the term “new covenant” derives from Jeremiah 31:31. He considers that to Paul the notion of the new covenant would have had immediate application to the issues he was facing in all of his churches, namely, how the inclusion of the Gentiles was to be understood. In 1 Corinthians 11:20 Paul refers to the community meal as the *kuriako\ndeipnon* (“Lord’s Supper”). The term “Lord” accords this meal a sacred character, which Smith (2003:191) views as comparable to the terminology found in the Sarapis cult, where the meal is termed “the couch of the Lord Sarapis”. Terminology such as this denotes that the meal functions in a ritual context, most probably a sacrificial one, but sacred meals are merely variations on the generic Greco-Roman banquet (cf Mack 1988:114-119). Distinctive was the way in which the deity was perceived as in some sense a participant in the meal. A close tie existed between the ideology of the meal and the religious values to be expressed. Sarapis, like the “Christian” “Lord”, would provide banquets that met the highest ideals of the culture. They would be banquets at which equality, friendship, and joy would prevail over disputes at the meal (Smith 2003:191). Numerous examples of anti-language occur in this passage. That Jesus refers to bread as his body and wine as his blood is probably the most obvious example of anti-language found in all of the texts.

A fourth example comprises John’s description of the last supper which Jesus and his disciples ate together (Jn 13:1-17:26), a version that differs from the description of the Last Supper in the Synoptic Gospels (as I have already mentioned). It is not a Passover meal and there are no references to any words of Jesus being uttered over bread and wine. But it is still a meal that refers symbolically to the death of Jesus and includes a command that the disciples

should do as he has done (Jn 13:14-15). This supper is described in a parallel section to those where the Last Supper is described in the other Gospels. But the interpretation of this meal is associated with a new ritual, the foot-washing, which indicates that the real significance of the shared meal is one of mutual service and mutual love (Theißen 1999:138). This is another example of Jesus “showing”. Smith (2003:274) explains:

The meal utilizes a motif from banquet tradition for its symbolic reference. The motif is the washing of the feet of the guests by a servant before the meal is to begin. Here Jesus moves from his position as a table participant, puts aside his clothing, and takes on the dress and role of the servant who washes the feet (13:4-12). It is a powerful symbol for the servant image of Jesus, a symbol first used to interpret the death of Jesus in Mark (10:45), then placed in the table-talk scene at the Last Supper by Luke (22:24-27), and now elaborated further by John. It carries a dual symbolism in John, as an interpretation of the death of Jesus (13:6-9) and as a model of servanthood for the disciples to follow (13:12-16).

Although John does not describe a traditional Last Supper scene, he does include words of Jesus pronounced over bread and wine in another text (Jn 6:53-54), but without offering a profound religious interpretation of the elements (Theißen 1999:138). The reference to “eating flesh and drinking blood” refers to the radical boundary now drawn between the Johannine community and its neighboring synagogue community. And this border is created by means of anti-language. From the point of view of the Johannine community (now no longer a synagogue community but rather a meal community) it is the meal that constitutes a new boundary marker between the two communities, effectively supplementing, if not replacing, the synagogue as the boundary marker (Smith 2003:275).

A fifth implicit reference to anti-language can be found in Theißen’s (1999:135) description of the Eucharist as replacing sacrifices. He writes that in the



Eucharist the guilty consciousness that all life lives at the expense of other life is ritually stimulated. It is kept alert by the notion that another person is sacrificed<sup>30</sup> for the believers, who appropriate this life that has been surrendered for them in a primitive way – by symbolical cannibalism. Thus, the Eucharist expresses the hidden anti-social nature of human beings, in order to alter it into a motivation for maintaining pro-social order.

This notion can be illustrated by the following texts: What is performed outwardly in the Eucharist is in tension with the violent interpretations thereof, because in this sacrament everyday food is divided equally. The external celebration of the Eucharist demonstrates that life does not need to exist at the expense of other life, but that all have their share. Therefore, the Eucharist serves as an argument for strengthening the solidarity in the community. We notice this process in 1 Corinthians 11:17-26. Some prosperous members of the society displayed their status in order to shame the poor and either began the common meal early or claimed better food for themselves. Paul regards this violation of equality as an offence against the meaning of the Eucharist. The participants again become guilty of the death of Christ, because they again practice that life lived at the expense of other life which has become visible in the dying of one for all – and which is to be overcome by this death (Theißen 1999:136).

The drifting apart of religious meaning and outward celebration can result in the two being separated, as in John 6:51-59, where one many detect barbarian overtones in the religious interpretation of the Eucharist – the flesh of the Son of Man has to be eaten and his blood has to be drunk in order to gain eternal life. Then Christ will be in the believers and they in him. Theißen (1999:136-137) comments:

However, this crude archaic and magical notion is detached from the outward celebration of the eucharist and associated with the miraculous distribution of the bread. In it Christ himself is eaten as the 'bread of life' –

and in the context that clearly means that the revelation which is made possible through him is received.

This passage constitutes another example of anti-language. Theißen (1999:137) points out that “bread” and “food” are old images for wisdom. The magical Eucharistic words thus possess a spiritual significance (see also Jn 6:63), which leads Theißen (1999:138) to the following conclusion:

[T]he interpretation of Jesus’ death as a sacrificial death is only one of many interpretations in primitive Christianity. However, this very interpretation is extremely important. For there is much to suggest that only by being interpreted as a sacrificial death could the death of Jesus bring about the end of the centuries-old practice of sacrifice.

### **5.3.3 Eucharistic formulae in non-Biblical texts**

Since most of the available data for banquets comes from literary sources or is influenced by literary traditions, it is necessary to posit a distinction between social reality and literary idealization. Smith (2003:6) illustrates this point as follows: “Though we are purporting to study social forms, we do not in fact have access to ‘field reports’ or other objectively gathered observations of social behavior at banquets.” Smith (2003:8-9) argues that in the literary data, descriptions and allusions to meals tend to presuppose an idealized model to which the meal in question is being compared. One example is the philosophical banquet, as presented in the tradition of the symposium literature. This becomes a dominant model to which later descriptions of banquets are consistently compared. When analyzing data we must thus ascertain whether the author is presupposing an idealized model of the banquet as the point of reference<sup>31</sup> (cf Mack 1988:114).

According to Smith and Taussig (1990:15) the earliest texts that afford clear, unambiguous evidence for early forms of the liturgy of the Eucharist are not New Testament texts but those of the church fathers. Thurian and Wainwright

(1983:111-115) agree.<sup>32</sup> This does not mean that the New Testament is not important in this regard, but it is considered to function in the form preserved in the church's traditional interpretation rather than as an independent witness in itself.

Many documents outside of the New Testament furnish an account of early Eucharistic practices, for example:

- The *Didache*: This document was rediscovered in 1873. Opinions differ as to where and when it was written, but there is a general cautious agreement that it dates from the latter part of the first century (although it is likely to contain traditions from earlier periods) (see Layton 1968:343-383; Vööbus 1968; Niederwimmer 1989). It is roughly parallel in date and provenance to many of the New Testament documents. It may have been written in Syria. It was written in Greek and translated into Coptic, which means that it must have been used in Egypt. It is a document dealing with church order, which includes rules about baptism, fasting, and (it is generally agreed) about the Eucharist.
- The writings of Justin Martyr: He was born in Syria and converted to Christianity in 130 after experimenting with some of the other religions offered in the ancient world. His most important work is the *Apologia*, written about 150 in Rome: a defense of the Christian faith. Justin Martyr's intention is to show that it is possible to be a practicing "Christian" as well as being an intelligent person and a loyal Roman citizen. This work of his contains two important descriptions of the Eucharist, avoiding esoteric Christian terminology, because he is writing for outsiders.
- The *Traditio apostolica* of Hippolytus: Hippolytus was a presbyter in Rome at the start of the third century, and the *Traditio apostolica* can be dated to about 215. This document is a church order describing the discipline in

and arrangements for a Christian community. It was only identified recently, thanks to the work of scholars at the beginning of the twentieth century. As indicated in the title, it purports to have come straight from the hands of the apostles, but we know that (at least in editing) it was the work of Hippolytus. It contains detailed prescriptions for daily prayer, baptism, Eucharist, and ordination, and evidences a well-organized community. Though it was originally written in Greek, the earliest text we possess is a fifth-century Latin translation (see Stevenson 1989:16-19; Smith & Taussig 1990:66-67).

If we study these early texts describing the Eucharist, a faint picture emerges of how this ceremony might have taken place in the early days. Only baptized people could participate in the Eucharist. After baptism members of the congregation exchanged the kiss of peace, expressing reconciliation with each other, to mark the beginning of the Eucharist, the joyful response to Christ, expressed in the celebration of the Lord's Supper (Just, 1 *Apol* 65) (Oetting 1970: 35).

The earliest celebrations of the Eucharist most probably took place in the setting of an actual meal, which is sometimes called the *agape* (love feast). Each individual brought food, the congregation partook of it together, rich and poor alike, and any food that was left over was given to the poor (see 1 Cor 11:18-22; Ignatius, c 110). By the time of Justin Martyr (c 150), the Eucharist<sup>33</sup> seems to have been celebrated separately (Oetting 1970: 36-37).

Leavened bread was used and the wine was mixed with water. The deacons took the elements to the worshippers. In addition, the newly baptized were given milk and honey to symbolize that they were babies in Christ but also to show that they were now in the Promised Land, the land "flowing with milk and honey." Participants in the Eucharist believed that they received Christ's body and blood in the Eucharist (Iren, *Haer* IV.xviii; V.ii).

As was indicated earlier, none of the New Testament texts provides a liturgical “script” for the celebration of the Eucharist, but the *Didache* provides an example of a text that does. In chapter 9 and 10 one finds the earliest recorded Eucharistic prayers. A portion of the text reads as follows (*Did* 9:1-4 – see Jasper & Cuming 1975:14-15):

<sup>1</sup>*About the thanksgiving: give thanks thus:* <sup>2</sup>*First, about the cup: We give thanks to you, our Father, for the holy vine of your child David, which you made known to us through your child Jesus; glory to you for evermore.* <sup>3</sup>*And about the broken bread: We give thanks to you, our Father, for the life and knowledge which you made known to us through your child Jesus; glory to you for evermore.* <sup>4</sup>*As this broken bread was scattered over the mountains and when brought together became one, so let your Church be brought together from the ends of the earth in your kingdom; for yours are the glory and the power through Jesus Christ for evermore.*<sup>34</sup>

The *Didache* further differs from the Eucharistic texts we have in the New Testament, because there is no reference to a Last Supper tradition in the *Didache*, or to the death of Jesus, or to any words of Jesus interpreting this death. The meal is not presented as a continuation of something started by Jesus, nor as a commemoration of Jesus or Jesus’ death (Smith & Taussig 1990:66-67).

On the other hand, in his *Apologia*, Justin Martyr describes two Eucharists,<sup>35</sup> one following a baptism and the other an ordinary Sunday morning service. According to Jasper and Cuming (1990:25), these are the earliest surviving accounts of the Eucharist. Putting the two accounts together, the following outline is obtained:

- readings from the apostles or the prophets;
- discourse on the readings by the president;
- common prayers (standing);
- the kiss of peace;

- presentation of bread, mixed wine, and water (the last only after a baptism);
- prayers and thanksgiving<sup>36</sup> by the president (“praise and glory to God”); reply by the people (“amen”);
- distribution of the “eucharistized” elements by the deacons.

In his *Traditio apostolica*, Hippolytus records an early text of a Eucharistic prayer.<sup>37</sup> The translation raises problems, since the original Greek is largely lost. Like Justin Martyr, Hippolytus describes two Eucharists, one after an ordination, the other after a baptism. Put together, they produce the following outline (Jasper & Cuming 1990:31):

- the prayers;
- the kiss of peace;
- the offering (in baptism, with milk and honey, and water);
- the *anaphora* (including blessings over produce);
- discourse by the bishop, “giving a reason for all these things”;
- the fraction;
- the distribution.

The *anaphora* falls into six sections:

- the *Sursum corda*;
- the preface;
- the “installation” narrative;
- the *anamnesis*;
- the *epiclesis*;
- the *doxology*.

#### 5.3.4 The Eucharist and the Greco-Roman mystery religions

Numerous similarities are evident between the earliest Eucharist and some of the Greco-Roman mystery religions (Meyer 1987:226). To illustrate this point, in this section, I shall provide a cursory commentary on two examples of mystery

religions. My purpose is to emphasize the important role that alternate states of consciousness, as well as their verbalization in anti-language, played in rites.

My first example comprises the mystery religion in honor of the Greek god Dionysos, also called Bacchus (see Finegan 1989:172-173). Meyer (1987:63) points out that he was manifested in numerous ways and was worshipped in diverse rites. He may have originated in Thrace, but also had connections with Phrygia and possibly Crete. Sometimes he was depicted as assuming the form of a mighty bull (the embodiment of animal maleness) but he could also appear with fair skin and long curls (Meyer 1987:63):

At times his followers roamed the forests and the mountains, clothing themselves in fawn skins and wielding thyrsi (the long shafts, topped with ivy or vine leaves, that are symbols of the god), but actors also appeared in the official festivals and theaters of Dionysos, the god of drama, and wore their masks in the public performances of Greek plays.

Meyer (1987:63) explains that the worshipers of Dionysos acknowledged his presence in the raw flesh of wild beasts as well as the goblet of wine, in the phallus concealed in the *liknon* (a winnowing basket that might be used as a cradle for a baby), and also in the immortal human soul. A person who was confronted by the presence of Dionysos and became possessed by him, could feel his power in many different ways: in ecstasy, in inebriation, in sexuality, or in spiritual bliss. Such a person became one with Dionysos, and could even be called Bacche (feminine) or Bacchos (masculine) after the god himself. Little is known of the actual mysteries of Dionysos, but it appears as though they usually included eating and drinking. In the archaic mysteries, the initiates were said to tear animals to pieces and eat the flesh raw, as a way of assimilating the Dionysian power embodied within the animal. In more serene rites, the meal was a banquet. The holy drink was ordinary wine, the gift of the god.

There is a very clear resemblance between this mystery religion and the earliest Eucharist, especially in the eating of the “flesh” of the god and the drinking of wine, which was sometimes called “blood so sweet” (Meyer 1987:93-94).

My second example stems from the mystery religion in honor of Mithras (see Betz 1986:336). According to Meyer (1987:199) the evolution of the divine Mithras from his origin in the ancient past to his position as bull-slayer in the Roman mysteries is a long, complex, and largely unknown process (cf Finegan 1989:203-209). In the form in which this mystery is known to us, it was a Roman phenomenon that flourished in the Roman Empire from the second century CE onwards. The men devoted to Mithras entered the Mithraea, designed as caves, and participated in various purifications, initiatory rites, and ceremonial meals. Justin Martyr (*Apol* 66.4) records that the initiates took bread and a cup of water (or a mixed cup of water and wine – these elements may have been symbolic of the body and blood of the bull) and uttered certain formulas at a holy meal. The purpose of the Mithraic rituals was to effect salvation and transformation (Meyer 1987:199-200).

Once again the parallel with the earliest Eucharist is easily recognizable, especially in the ceremonial meals, in which the elements probably symbolically depicted the body and blood of the bull.

These similarities are once again explicable in terms of the shared milieu of the Greco-Roman world (Meyer 1987:226). People participated in the mystery religions because the latter enriched their lives, just as participation in the Eucharist added value to the earliest Jesus-followers' lives. The important role that alternate states of consciousness played in rites can perhaps be perceived more easily in the mystery religions than in the earliest Eucharist – this reinforces my theory that in the early Mediterranean world, alternate states of consciousness were part and parcel of ceremonies and that anti-language was used to verbalize these states (cf Burkert 1987:114).



This concludes the present section regarding the “telling” of the earliest Jesus-followers. The word about Jesus’ way of life, as illustrated in his open commensality, spread fast, because it added *value* to believers’ lives. Because participation in the Eucharist was an extraordinary event and because the Eucharist acted as the integration ceremony of an anti-society, ordinary language was not adequate to illustrate the way it enriched participants’ lives; therefore anti-language was employed. To be a part of early Jesus-groups imparted meaning to believers’ lives; they expressed this meaning by “re-enacting” what they were “told” Jesus had “showed”, by means of participating in the symbolic integration ceremony they called the Eucharist. In the next section this “re-enactment”, and the *meaning* it gave to their lives, will be discussed.

#### **5.4 MEANING: HOLY MEALS AS A CULTURAL CEREMONIAL SYMBOL OF INTEGRATION INTO AN ALTERNATIVE SOCIETY**

##### **5.4.1 Introduction**

As indicated in chapters 1 and 3, the earliest Jesus-followers formed an anti-society. People became members of this society because membership gave *meaning* to their lives; and membership was imparted by means of baptism. Once they had become members, the Eucharistic table was the occasion where they demonstrated their solidarity with one another. Hence, the Eucharist can be termed a ceremony of integration (see Theißen 1999:121). The Eucharist can be described as a “re-enactment” of Jesus’ open commensality.

To indicate what this “re-enactment” entailed, I first intend to discuss the Eucharist as a ceremony of integration; then I shall investigate the role alternate states of consciousness played in the earliest Eucharist; subsequently, the place of the Eucharist in anti-society will be discussed and lastly, I shall examine the meaning of Jesus’ open commensality.

#### **5.4.2 The Eucharist as ceremony of integration**

As remarked in chapter 3, the function of ceremonies is to co-ordinate life in communities. According to Theißen (1999:122-123), this process took place mainly through sacrifices<sup>38</sup> (see Hanson 1979:28), especially where these were connected with shared meals. This leads him to conclude that the earliest Eucharist is a ceremony of integration, which is constantly repeated and renews the cohesion of the community, especially because it replaced the earlier sacrifices, as I noted above (cf Pilch 1996c:95-96; Meier 1997:267; Koch 2001:239).

As a rule, rites are ancient and have been practiced since primal times. In contrast, the Eucharist is a new rite, because it originated with a charismatic figure of the recent past – Jesus (see Theißen & Merz 1996:359-360). To Theißen (1999:126) “Jesus provided the stimulus for the eucharist by associating with his person at his last supper...meals which were held repeatedly.” The meals that Jesus hosted were originally prophetic symbolic actions (i.e., patterns of action focused on a unique situation, in order to convey a message) (cf Pilch 1981:109; 1996c:95-96). The unique situation of these meals encompassed the fact that they were held in the face of the imminent end of the world, and that they could not be separated from their founder. Their message proclaimed that God’s salvation is made present through fellowship with toll collectors and sinners – with a view to the “eschatological” feast in the kingdom of God to which all people will stream from all over the world (Theißen 1999:126-127).

Theißen (1999:127), therefore, concludes that the Eucharist is a threshold ritual, which opens the way to a new world. Jesus held his meals in anticipation of the eschatological feast in the kingdom of God (Mk 14:25). In threshold rituals we find an anti-structure to the traditional forms of life: “In celebrating a meal with his disciples in Passover week...to which he gives a special significance by words of interpretation, Jesus is implicitly, perhaps even deliberately, constructing an

alternative to the temple ritual” (Theißen 1999:27; see Theißen & Merz 1996:380-383).

In the opinion of Theißen (1999:128), a “sacrament” could develop from Jesus’ meals because they contained traces of a confrontation with an eschatological end that was about to break in immediately. Because of this, the people who participated in such meals experienced eternity as breaking into their ordinary time.<sup>39</sup> But before a “sacrament” could come into being, the symbolic meals had to be reinterpreted. This occurred by means of a threefold change (that has already been described throughout this chapter):

- the reference to the death of Jesus;
- the tension between outward performance and religious significance;
- and the crossing of taboo thresholds.

The reference to Jesus’ death highlights an aspect that has already been perceived as present in his meals: the forgiveness of sins. To Theißen (1999:130) “[t]he earthly Jesus’ acceptance of the sinner at table on an equal footing now becomes possible – after his death and in his absence – by a reference to his ‘dying for us’ (and by the conviction of his mysterious presence at the eucharist as the risen Christ).” Here is once again evident the importance of alternate states of consciousness, because this was the way in which the risen Christ could be experienced as present at the Eucharistic table.

The reference to the death of Jesus in the Eucharist thus reinforces the link with the forgiveness of sins. In this way, such forgiveness becomes independent of the earthly Jesus, whose presence at meals represented the presence of salvation for those around the table. By being grounded in the death of Jesus, forgiveness of sins remains accessible even after his death. Since the rite of the Eucharist was now detached from Jesus (who had “invented” it), it could be repeated. The original reference to future salvation is supplemented by a

reference to the past – the death of Jesus, in which salvation has already been realized (Theißen 1999:130).

It is now appropriate to discuss the role that alternate states of consciousness played in the earliest Eucharist.

#### **5.4.3 The earliest Eucharist and alternate states of consciousness**

As I suggested earlier, participation in the earliest Eucharist implied the experience of alternate states of consciousness. The notion of eating together with gods or spirits is found in many cultures. The idiom of commensality is one of mutual respect and good will; sharing food or drink with a ghost or spirit, as with anybody else, implies amity and especially reconciliation (Beattie 1968:234).

In all the Gospels we notice the last meal of Jesus being adapted to the specific situation of that community (see Smith & Taussig 1990:51-58). In Acts the community meal is called “the breaking of bread” (Ac 2:46; 20:7, 11; 27:35). This is most probably the case because of the special significance given to the breaking of bread in the Jesus story (Lk 22:19). We do not know what form the bread ceremony took nor how it functioned, but in Luke 24:30-35 one may perceive that in the “breaking of the bread” the risen Lord is somehow “known” to them. From Galatians 2:11-14 and 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 we can assume that in Paul’s time communal meals already constituted a regular part of the worship gatherings of the various “early Christian” communities (Smith & Taussig 1990:59-66).

Crossan (2003:29) argues that unlike John, Jesus did not announce a monopoly but a “franchise”, so that both his own life and all others so lived entered into the kingdom of God.<sup>40</sup> Jesus claimed that he could *already* enter the kingdom of God and that the kingdom of God could *already* be realized for people who lived their lives as he did (Crossan 2003:49). This was symbolized by participating in the Eucharist. The Eucharist made the kingdom of God a reality in the present lives

of the participants. We should keep in mind that the earliest Jesus-followers adopted an apocalyptic worldview (see chapter 2; Van Henten & Mellink 1998:12). In the earliest Jesus-followers' practice of regularly celebrating the "Last Supper" until Christ would return ("in memory of Christ"), this apocalyptic worldview is foregrounded. By doing this they experienced "another" time, the time of God, as breaking into ordinary time. This is nothing else than the experience of an alternate state of consciousness.

We know that sharing the same cup implied sharing in the meaning of that cup as well (as in the Israelite Passover tradition). This is why Jesus asked God to let the cup pass him by in Gethsemane (Mk 14:35-36), because he knew what this image implied (cf Smith 2003:251; see Bolkestein 1977:328-329). The two disciples (Mk 10:35-40) did not understand the implication of their request to sit at the left and right hand side of Jesus in his glory (Bolkestein 1977:237-240). The second most important person (after the host) always sat at his right hand side was required to drink first. The implication of this is that if one drinks from the cup at the Eucharistic table, one shares in Jesus' fate, since the cup is placed in conjunction with the cross. But by choosing to die, in actual fact one gains life. All of this makes sense if understood from an apocalyptic perspective, in conjunction with alternate states of consciousness and anti-language.

Marxsen (1979:107) also affirms that fulfillment in the kingdom of God is often thought of as taking the form of a table fellowship. If we bear in mind that Jesus ate with people who were considered culturally unclean, it becomes clear that the early Jesus-followers perceived the meals of Jesus apocalyptically. Marxsen (1979:108) observes that after Easter, the community continued to celebrate meals (Ac 2), and they did so with joy. They believed Jesus to be present at these meals.

What might this imply for a first-century Mediterranean Jesus-follower? In other words, on a practical level, if one announced that God's new creation, God's

justified world, was already present, what would one do if somebody asked one to show them where this newness could be found? Crossan (2003:50-51) explains a possible scenario as follows:

Imagine Paul explaining Jesus' resurrection to a polite pagan colleague as they worked together in a leather canvas shop? Or, even better, to the woman who owned the shop? What could possibly convince them that a new creation was all around them, not just imminent but already present, not just coming soon but already started? What would have been at stake for them in such a conversation? What would move them, if movement were at all possible, from 'how very nice for Jesus' to 'I believe'? This? The God of all creation to whom this world belongs is a God of distribute justice and not just of absolute power. That God has begun the climactic justification of the world by raising Jesus from the dead and thereby negating the official, legal, and public power of imperial Rome. But where and how, Paul, is that at work? What could Paul answer? Something like this? There is a small group of us who meet for prayer in that sardine-shop at the corner before it opens each day. And once a week we meet there to share half of all we made from the preceding week's work. We call that meal the Lord's Supper because we believe that all creation belongs to the Lord and that we must share the Lord's food equally among us. We share what is not our own and that is the Lord's type of meal, the Lord's style of supper. So, I invite you. Come and see if God is not already making a more perfect world right under your very noses. And, by the way, we have small groups like this one here in every city of the Roman Empire. It is not just how many we are but how everywhere we are. And whenever one of you turns from Caesar, who crucified Jesus, you participate in this justification of the world. It is a choice between the divine Caesar and the divine Jesus. Come to the sardine-seller's shop the day after tomorrow and see and decide for yourself. Come and see how we live, and then you can choose to join us or to depart in peace.

By means of taking part in the Eucharist the earliest Jesus-followers, thus, already participated in the kingdom of God.<sup>41</sup> Since the world around them was continuing its natural course, this experience must have taken place in alternate states of consciousness. In John 21 we read of another instance where the disciples experienced an alternate state of consciousness. This occurs after a night of fishing, so that it could be attributed to a lack of sufficient rest, a physio-psychological condition which can induce an alternate state of consciousness. Initially the disciples fail to recognize Jesus, but then they do recognize him (Jn 21:4, 7, 12) and lengthy, non-verbal communication follows, namely the eating of bread and fish (Jn 21:9-14). Subsequently, they communicate verbally (Jn 21:15-23) (see Pilch 1996a:137; 1998a:54-55). This is one of the earliest descriptions of communion with the risen Lord as a result of alternate states of consciousness.

In the next section, I shall describe the context within which the Eucharist as a ceremony of integration played such an important role.

#### **5.4.4 Anti-society and the earliest Eucharist**

In chapters 1 and 3, I argued that the earliest Jesus-followers formed an anti-society, structured on the basis of a fictive kinship. If we bear in mind that at a very early stage Jesus-movements were already characterized by great diversity (Pelser 1987:557), we need to ask the question how a sense of cohesion could develop so easily. How could individuals from diverse ethnic, religious, and social backgrounds come to call one another “brothers and sisters”? How were these bonds created and experienced? Smith (2003:184) theorizes that the most likely locus for this development is the community meal, with its unparalleled power to define social boundaries and create social bonding.

Smith (2003:184-185) suggests that we see this development taking place especially in Paul. The meal had already become a focus for communal identity prior to Paul. To meet for a meal was a natural thing to do, and to develop social

bonds as a result was expected. But soon there developed a distinctive theological rationale for the community meal – it came to be defined as a memorial feast commemorating the death of Jesus. This was the shape of the meal that Paul inherited. Smith (2003:184-185) also writes that with this development a “new wrinkle” was taking shape with the wholesale inclusion of Gentiles in the Jesus-groups. Up until this point, the “people of God” had been the people of Israel, and their status was indicated by the boundary markers of circumcision and some level of adherence to laws of purity. As long as the community was drawn primarily from an Israelite and proselyte constituency these boundaries could still be assumed. But when Gentiles began to claim community membership as Gentiles, something new was starting to occur. How could Gentiles come to believe that they were part of God’s people without being circumcised? This process had begun with the initiation rite of baptism, as described in chapter 4. But Smith (2003:185) illustrates that it was participation in the meal that provided the catalyst for this development. It was the meal that created a sense of belonging, of social bonding with the community.

Elliott (1991:387) confirms this analysis in his assessment of Luke-Acts. He writes that in contrast to the Jerusalem temple and the exclusivist purity and legal system it represents, in Luke-Acts, “food and meals, together with their associated domestic relations, are used to depict an inclusive form of social relations which transcends previous Jewish purity regulations and gives concrete social expression to the inclusive character of the gospel, the kingdom of God and the Christian mission.”

#### **5.4.5 The meaning of Jesus’ open commensality**

In Luke 7:31-35 and Matthew 11:16-19 an early tradition contains significant data about the meals of Jesus. These accounts stem from Q. In these texts Jesus’ enemies call him a “glutton and drunkard”, a “friend of tax collectors and sinners”.<sup>42</sup> By contrasting Jesus and John, these texts demonstrate that meal habits can represent a lifestyle in a larger sense, and that the choice of lifestyle



can be perceived to function as part of the total message of the teacher. Jesus is also viewed as creating bonds of friendship, simply by dining with certain individuals. These texts have been widely interpreted as representing a tradition of the historical Jesus. But in its present form the narrative is clearly a product of the early Jesus-movement. Therefore, it also provides information about the form and function of meals in the Q-community (Smith & Taussig 1990:44-45). The only point that we can affirm about the historical Jesus in this regard, is that Jesus probably attended banquets and that this action was seen to be consistent with his overall message (cf Mack 1988:80-81). But this statement does not represent a consensus in scholarship – the problems connected with research into the historical Jesus are too complex and laden with theological weight for any consensus to emerge (Koester 1992:15; cf Perrin 1967:102-108; Smith & Taussig 1990:47).

What did the Eucharist signify for the earliest followers of Jesus? The Greek word *eu) xariste&w*, is normally translated “thank you”. But since the words “thank you” in the Mediterranean world meant the termination of a relationship (and in the Eucharist participants are definitely not terminating a relationship with God), the phrase should rather be translated as “be thankful” or “feel obligated to thank” (Danker 2000:415), because this is exactly what the earliest Jesus-followers probably attempted to do by participating in the Eucharist – expressing their indebtedness to God. In this action is perceivable a sense of obligation to acknowledge God publicly as beneficent beyond any imagination (see Pilch 2002b:49-53). De Jonge (2001:210; cf Pelsers [s a]b:167) considers that the purpose of the community meal was the realization of the communion (*koινωνi/a*) which the members of the congregation felt they missed in the outside world.<sup>43</sup> They believed that Christ was present, both in the reading and preaching of the Word and at the table in the sharing of the bread and wine. They prayed that they would be united with one another and with Christ and would share in the joys of eternity (Stevenson 1989:62-63). In chapter 4 it was argued that by means of baptism, a *person* participates in the death and resurrection of

Christ. In the Eucharist the *whole community* participates in the death and resurrection of Christ (Cullmann 1969:29-30).

Bartchy (2002:175) argues that in word and deed Jesus of Nazareth sought to undermine traditional meal practices that provided easy opportunities for males in his culture to seek honor and display their acquired or ascribed honor. In Bartchy's opinion Jesus' vision of human relationships submitted to the rule of God required a reversal of expectations regarding the giving and receiving of honor. He writes:

One distinctive feature of the historical Jesus' public life was his practice of a radically inclusive, status-leveling, and honor-sharing fellowship at table as a central strategy in his announcement and redefinition of the in-breaking ruling of Israel's God. In so doing, Jesus of Nazareth presented a living parable and model of his vision of a renewed Israel. His actions profoundly challenged the inherent exclusivism and status consciousness sustained by the prevailing cultural values and social codes.

In the same vein, Van Staden (1991:233) explains the purpose of open meals as being to advocate compassion. He adds:

On the basis of this value [compassion], derived from the symbolic universe, the asymmetrical relationship between patron and client, directed at generating as much [sic] reciprocal benefits as possible, would be changed into a relationship of compassionate caring on the part of the elite for the non-elite.

For Van Staden this purpose can be clearly perceived in Luke, whose main strategy for accomplishing it, is to have the main character in his narrative, Jesus, proclaiming and demonstrating this value in his life story, thereby giving divine sanction to it. And the exercise of compassion can most clearly be seen in Jesus' meals. Van Staden (1991:244) adds that even today, as in Luke's time, compassion should be the essence of life (cf Hancock 2005:268).

As I commented earlier, table fellowship was very important amongst the cultures of the Mediterranean basin in the first century: Mealtimes were “laden with meanings” that exceeded consumption of food (Bartchy 2002:175). Being welcomed at a table to eat with another person was a ceremony richly symbolic of friendship, intimacy and social unity. The context within which meals were consumed comprised the extended family. Beyond the household, people preferred to eat with persons from their own social class. Invitations to meals were given to people with the same social, religious and economic status, in order that the invited person could return the favor in a relationship of balanced reciprocity. Even in everyday meals fundamental social values, boundaries, statuses, and hierarchies were reinforced. Bartchy (2002:176; see Douglas 1972:79-80) explains: “Anyone who challenged these rankings and boundaries would be judged to have acted dishonorably, a serious charge in cultures based on the values of honor and shame. Transgressing these customs consistently would make a person a dangerous enemy of social stability.” Bartchy (2002:176-177) believes that solid evidence exists for concluding that the historical Jesus threatened the social order encoded in the meal tradition of his culture. He contends that everyone in the first-century Mediterranean world would expect that meals would constitute exclusive occasions in which honor was given to those to whom honor was due. In contrast to this Jesus did exactly the opposite. For him honor was still a key value, but he made honor by birth and acquired honor irrelevant: he bestowed everyone (without regard for social status, personal accomplishment, purity or health) with honor in the name of Israel’s God. Instead of seeking honor for himself, Jesus was prepared to be humiliated. For him, in contrast to the popular understanding, honor was not in limited supply. His God offered an unlimited supply of honor; in turn, those honored by God possessed the social resources to accord honor to others without fear of diminishing their own. Non-retaliation, thus, became the only honorable response to a challenge to one’s personal honor. Meals became an especially prominent occasion for this outrageous giving of honor to all, around a radically inclusive table (Bartchy 2002:181-182).

In conclusion, the two basic ethical values among the earliest Jesus-followers, according to Theißen (1999:63), were love of neighbor and renunciation of status. Since everybody who believed in Christ and was baptized could participate in the Eucharist on an equal level, the Eucharist could be viewed as *the* place where the “early Christian” ethic was lived out.

## 5.5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this chapter, I have attempted to demonstrate that the earliest Eucharist (like the earliest baptism) represented an anti-language verbalization of alternate states of consciousness. By participating in the Eucharist, the earliest followers of Jesus experienced the presence of God among them. They spoke about this experience in anti-language, since ordinary language was not adequate to verbalize such an extraordinary experience. All of this exerted a lasting effect on their lives – they lived according to the example Jesus set, because they believed that they participated in his death and resurrection. They were now part of a new family, who even kissed one another before partaking in the Eucharist, so as to illustrate their kinship. If you shared a meal in the first-century Mediterranean world, it meant that you shared this kind of relationship. The earliest Jesus-followers shared a special relationship with each other as well as with Jesus (in alternate states of consciousness), and they illustrated this by means of the ceremony of the Eucharist.

The *reason* why the earliest Jesus-followers placed a strong emphasis on participating in the ceremony of the Eucharist, was that Jesus “showed” them what it was like to be part of the kingdom of God, by means of the meals in which he participated. The earliest Jesus-followers “told” this to others, by means of anti-language, which we can trace back to early texts bearing witness to the earliest Eucharist, because of the *value* which participation in the Eucharist added to their lives. Then early Jesus-groups “re-enacted” what they had been told by means of the ceremony of the Eucharist, because the latter gave *meaning* to their lives. Although they were persecuted, they apocalyptically experienced

the presence of God directly in their lives, by means of alternate states of consciousness. This experience changed their lives, because they now lived according to a new ethic, as “brothers and sisters” in faith.

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## ENDNOTES: CHAPTER 5

<sup>1</sup> Although practical issues such as whether one cup (chalice) or small individual cups should be used during the Eucharist (see e.g., McPartlan 1995:97-112); or whether children or only adults are allowed to participate in the Eucharist, predominate in some conservative churches' discussion of the Eucharist today (see e.g., Holmes [1972] 1982; Vos 1999), these issues fall outside the scope of this study.

<sup>2</sup> See Theißen & Merz (1996:361-366) for a summary of the history of research into the Eucharist.

<sup>3</sup> Bradshaw (2002:118) points out that at least up to the middle of the twentieth century the majority of liturgical scholars believed that all the early Eucharistic rites were ultimately derived from a single apostolic archetype. But as more and more evidence for early practices emerged, they had to qualify their theories to some extent. One example is the work of Duchesne (1904, 1909), which became a standard work for the first half of the twentieth century. He maintained that while there must have been variation in the details of early Eucharistic rites and that the celebrant would have had some freedom, e.g., in improvising the prayers, "[a]t the beginning the procedure was almost identical everywhere...." But he had to admit that it was not long before "local diversities" had "crept into the ritual. The uses of Rome, Antioch, and Alexandria must, in the third century, have departed widely from the primitive uniformity..." (Duchesne 1904:54). Bradshaw (2002:119) says that on the other hand there were also scholars who argued on dogmatic grounds that Christ had prescribed no particular form of Eucharistic rite for the church to follow, while others opposed the single-origin theory on textual grounds – later Eucharistic rites showed such diversity among themselves that it was difficult to see any real evidence to suggest that they were descended from a single archetype. The publication of the *Didache*, with its unusual liturgical provisions, in 1883, presented a challenge to the majority view: "*Didache* 9 contains prayers for what it describes as a *eucharistia*: a short prayer of thanksgiving to be said over 'the cup' followed by a somewhat longer prayer to be said over the 'broken bread' (*klasma*); and *Didache* 10 a lengthy prayer of thanksgiving to be said 'after being filled', ending with the direction the prophets were to be allowed to give thanks (*eucharistein*) as they wished. Chapter 14 also gave the brief instruction that on the Lord's Day its readers were to 'break bread and give thanks' (*eucharistesate*). Clearly, if Chapters 9 and 10 were describing an actual Eucharist, it was of a very different kind from those otherwise known from Christian antiquity" (Bradshaw 2002:119).

<sup>4</sup> Bradshaw (2002:119-139) offers a critical summary of contributions regarding the origins of the Eucharistic rite. He concludes this discussion by saying that there have been three main obstacles to real progress in the search for the origins and development of early Eucharistic practices among the earliest followers of Jesus (Bradshaw 2002:139-143):

- There has been a widespread belief that it is necessary to trace both the overall pattern of the rite and the prayer used in it back to a standard fixed "Jewish" liturgy. Here we must keep in mind that we do not know the precise form of either of these "Jewish" institutions nor how much they were subject to variation in the first century. Nor do we know exactly when that pattern became universal in "Christian" practice. Regarding the "Jewish" prayer – it certainly exerted a significant influence on the "Christian" Eucharistic practices, but it was definitely not the only influence.
- There has been a general desire to situate all extant examples of later "Christian" rites and prayers within a single line of development. But to pick from the debris of history only those pieces that fit our preconceived pattern and to ignore those that do not is to distort the picture.
- There has been an unquestioned assumption that an early "Christian" community's Eucharistic prayer, whether in written form or orally transmitted, would always have been a single, flowing, seamless whole. "Jewish" prayers were most probably composed of short, individual units which might be combined together, and there are signs of similar

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patterns in the earliest Jesus-groups. It is, therefore, not surprising that we find a diversity of patterns of *anaphoras* in the evidence of “early Christianity”, originally formed more often by the combination of small pre-existent units as the situation required than by the creation of unitary compositions. While some of these may well have their roots in “Jewish” meal-prayers, others are likely to have arisen out of quite different contexts, both “Jewish” and “Christian”, especially once “Christianity” had moved away from its “Jewish” roots and perhaps no longer distinguished so sharply between *euchological* forms which had originally been used for other purposes. In most cases, these prayers probably circulated orally rather than in written form until perhaps the late third or even fourth century, when the relatively fluid prayer traditions began to crystallize and more stable, written texts began to appear. We can conclude that a measure of selective evolution took place. Then apparently there began a phase of standardization and cross-fertilization, to complete the classical shape of the Eucharistic prayer with its different regional variants which characterized later “Christian” history.

<sup>5</sup> The local communities among the earliest Jesus-followers for the most part stemmed from the pre-existing Israelite communities; therefore, a strong resemblance existed between the organization of the church and that of the synagogue. This resemblance is especially apparent in the sphere of worship. We should keep in mind that there was a major difference between the temple in Jerusalem and the synagogues. The former did not influence the “Christian” liturgy. Although the “early church” took over some of the basic elements of the service of the synagogue, they also added a few elements, like baptism and the Lord’s Supper. After the Eucharist, certain inspired persons began to preach and to make manifest before the assembly the presence of the Holy Spirit. But this soon disappeared: from the beginning of the second century onwards we find only isolated instances thereof (see Duchesne 1904:46-49).

<sup>6</sup> Although Smith’s explanation makes a lot of sense, I suggest that it is risky to trace *all* traditions back to *one* common tradition. But for the most part his model is applicable to many of the data we possess regarding the earliest Eucharist, and, therefore, I am going to employ the information he provides, although critically. What is distinctive about Smith’s approach is that contrary to a large body of previous scholarship, he does not argue that Paul utilized a particular form of meal, such as the Passover meal or the meal of the mystery cults, as his model. Instead, he refers to a generic meal model stemming from the culture, one which is utilized by groups throughout the Greco-Roman world, including Judaism and the mystery cults. He also does not use the Lord’s Supper tradition quoted by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 as the primary determinant of his meal theology, because this is a tradition Paul derives from other sources, not one that he created. He quotes it as an authoritative resource and then interprets it. Paul accords it his own singular interpretation, one that derives from banquet ideology. In Smith’s (2003:175) words: “Thus his overall discussion and model for the meal does not, in fact, come from the Lord’s Supper tradition but from the generic banquet tradition. But once more that should not surprise us, for the Lord’s Supper tradition is itself to be seen as a variation on generic banquet tradition; indeed, that is how Paul reads it.”

<sup>7</sup> For Smith (2003:20; cf Mack 1988:114) the differentiation of social class played a role in the preservation of material regarding the Greco-Roman banquet tradition: “By and large our evidence will reflect the values and customs of the upper classes. We cannot easily account for differentiations of customs and values in the lower classes, since we have very little evidence to go on. However, since we are dealing with a specific social institution, namely, the banquet, rather than meal customs in general, we can expect some uniformity of customs and values to be connected with it in whatever level of society it might be found.”

<sup>8</sup> Wulff (1997:70) makes an interesting remark regarding fasting and alternate states of consciousness. He says that fasting (the partial or complete abstention from food and drink for a specific period of time) was not ordinarily undertaken with the goal of creating an alternate state

of consciousness, but since it led to alternate states of consciousness, it also became a means of seeking prophetic revelations and a technique of spiritual discipline.

<sup>9</sup> Smith (2003:64) shows that in satire, the banquet was seen as a symbol for the excess of luxurious living: “The banquet worked as a symbol because it was perceived as the preeminent social event for the exhibition of refined living. And as a symbol, it was widely utilized in ethical discussions, for it indicated what the cultured life should not be, in the case of satire, or what the cultured life should be, in the case of philosophical ethics. Thus the banquet as cultural symbol transcended genre and literary context. It carried such a symbolic force in itself that it could function as a paradigm for comments and social ethics in a variety of contexts.”

<sup>10</sup> An adequate reading scenario for understanding the “code” of a meal, according to Neyrey (1991:362), will consist of five parts. He says that meals should be examined:

- as ceremonies;
- as mirrors of social systems;
- in terms of body symbolism;
- in terms of reciprocity;
- and in terms of social relations.

<sup>11</sup> In this regard, Smith (2003:38-39) observes: “Much like we do today, ancients tended to mark special events and rites of passage with banquets....Birthdays, weddings, and funerals were also occasions for festive meals.”

<sup>12</sup> Den Heyer (1997:84-89) comment that we need to keep in mind the findings of historical criticism, namely, that the bigger the gap between “Christianity” and “Judaism”, the more negatively the Pharisees were depicted by the Gospel writers. Therefore, we cannot be sure exactly what Jesus’ attitude was towards the Pharisees. On the other hand, Funk and the Jesus Seminar (1998:530) assert that Jesus did most probably infringe the Sabbath codes on occasion.

<sup>13</sup> This form is reflected in the Lord’s Supper traditions in the New Testament in which the wine is drunk “after supper [*deipnon*]” (Lk 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25). The appetizer course at the beginning of the meal is reflected in the early Israelite Passover liturgy (“When they bring him the food, he dips the lettuce in vinegar before he comes to the breaking of the bread”; M Pes 10:3) (Smith & Taussig 1990:25-26).

<sup>14</sup> I write “his”, because in the first-century Mediterranean world men ate alone. Women and children younger than the age of puberty did not eat with them. Only a widow was allowed to serve the men (see Pilch 1997c:98). In general the symposium of the classical Greek period was a celebration of aristocratic male culture. Flute girls and prostitutes were the only females allowed. Later this custom was altered. Because reclining was a posture that required that one be served, it tended to be associated with a class which owned servants (Smith 2003:42-45).

<sup>15</sup> De Jonge (2001:234) argues that when reconstructing the earliest history of the Eucharist, 1 Corinthians and the *Didache* should be used as the main sources, because they are mutually independent sources of a common, earlier, tradition. I do not hold that they necessarily come from the *same* tradition, but I take note that the *Didache* is also an important source regarding the Eucharist and will take this into consideration later in this chapter.

<sup>16</sup> See Schweitzer (1982:60; cf Feld 1976:18-31) for a detailed explanation regarding the variations among the Synoptic accounts. He views the Markan version as authentic, but I do not consider that we can single out one version as *the* authentic version.



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<sup>17</sup> According to Jasper and Cuming (1990:8) we find “pre-echoes” of the Eucharist in the Passover. The ritual as recorded in c 200 can be summarized as follows:

- Blessing over the first cup.
- *Hors d'oeuvres* (herbs and sauce).
- Explanation (*haggadah*) by the head of the house.
- First part of the *hallel* (Psalm 113 or Psalms 113-114).
- The second cup.
- Blessing over the (unleavened) bread.
- The Passover lamb.
- Blessing (*Birkath ha-mazon*) over the third cup (“the cup of blessing”).
- Second part of the *hallel* (Psalms 114-118 or 115-118).
- Praise over the fourth cup.

<sup>18</sup> In this verse one should note the resemblance between Jesus and Socrates. Socrates also taught by means of the Greek symposium, and he also had to die because it was the correct thing to do. But Socrates died by *literally* drinking a cup (filled with poison) (see Stumpf 1988:43-45).

<sup>19</sup> For a commentary on the debate whether the Eucharist was indeed installed at a Passover celebration, see Conzelmann (1992:130-140) and Bornkamm (1963:149).

<sup>20</sup> The *Symposion* tradition also demonstrates ties with the messianic banquet. It provided a means to idealize a hero, as Socrates was idealized in Plato's *Symposion*. Smith (2003:284-285) considers that Jesus was idealized in the same way in the Gospel tradition. Whenever Jesus dined, the messianic banquet lay somewhere in the background: “One of the more interesting meals of Jesus is the wedding feast at Cana, found only in John's Gospel. Here the components of the meal are all present, including the wine, which is essential for festivities. What is remarkable about the story, which occupies a prime position in John as the “first sign” or miracle of Jesus, is what the miracle consists of. What Jesus does by changing water into wine is, in effect, to guarantee that the festivities will continue, and for a long time too, considering how much wine is provided. The value being reinforced here is the festive nature of the messianic banquet.”

<sup>21</sup> Since there are significant differences between the various narratives, scholars have been divided over which of them, if any, has best preserved the historical details. A few instances follow: Jeremias (1949:57; 1973:274-277) opted for the Marcan version of the interpretative words of Jesus over the bread and wine as coming closest to the original, Schürmann (1968, 1970, 1977) expressed a strong preference for the Lukan narrative with its eschatological emphasis, and Schweizer (1967:10-17) considered the Pauline account the most primitive in form, in spite of its more obvious liturgical character. More recently, Léon-Dufour (1987:82-85, 96-98) argues that older and newer elements are combined in all the traditions, but he still considers that a careful analysis should begin with the Pauline tradition, because the “polishing effect of continued use would explain quite nicely the strict parallelism evident in the Marcan tradition” (Léon-Dufour 1987:98). Regarding any influence on the narratives by the liturgical practices of the first “Christians”, Bradshaw (2002:62) concludes that the most we can say is that, because the narratives were passed on within “Christian” communities which celebrated the Eucharist, their liturgical experience may have had some effect on the way in which these groups told the story of the Last Supper.

<sup>22</sup> As I have already mentioned, the tradition that Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners, is most probably historical (see e.g., Perrin 1967:102-108). There are two basic versions: a description of a meal with Jesus at the home of a tax collector and a sayings tradition in which Jesus is criticized for eating with tax collectors and sinners. The meal tradition is found in its earliest form in Mark and the sayings tradition is to be seen in its earliest form in Q. Both texts

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can be understood as types of the *chreia*: a form of rhetoric that is described in ancient literature and was taught in the schools. It can be defined as “a saying or act that is well-aimed or apt, expressed concisely, attributed to a person, and regarded as useful for living” (Robbins 1988:2; cf Fischel 1968:373). *Chreia* was originally utilized to characterize a sage-philosopher or sage-hero (see Fischel 1968:373-374). Two types of *chreia* were widely used, namely, the Stoic *chreia* and the Cynic *chreia*. The former places emphasis on moral teaching and the latter contains a final statement about the sage-hero that becomes the basis for a demonstration of Cynic ideals and values. The *chreiai* in the Jesus tradition tend to be of the Cynic type (see Kloppenborg 1987:324-325; Smith 2003:227-228).

<sup>23</sup> Crossan (1992:398-404; 1994:178-179) adds that open commensality could be ritualized into Eucharists of bread and fish just as well as bread and wine – hence, the bread and fish Eucharists in the early tradition. He concludes this on the grounds of the fact that the latter could not have been created if a bread-and-wine symbolization had already officially antedated them.

<sup>24</sup> See Schweitzer (1982:58-137) for a detailed description of the scholarship regarding the Eucharist in the nineteenth century.

<sup>25</sup> His theory regarding the table fellowship theme has been widely employed by subsequent authors.

<sup>26</sup> According to Stevenson (1989:63), sacrifice was an important theme in the lives of the earliest Jesus-followers. He says that to the early followers of Jesus “sacrifice was something experienced all the time, with the ritual slaughter of animals at pagan altars. But they were anxious to explore the *moral* aspect of sacrifice, that the Eucharist is not a cozy habit to get into but implies (and requires) mutual commitment, right relationships within the congregation, and “Christlikeness” both during the service and also when it is over and the world makes its obvious and often crushing demands.”

<sup>27</sup> See Stegemann (2001:310-327) for the difference between an ancient and a modern understanding of sacrifice.

<sup>28</sup> Seen against the martyrological background, the language of “body for you” and “shedding of blood” had already become established as terminology for the death of a martyr (Mack 1988:118). Smith (2003:190) writes that Jesus’ death could easily have been interpreted very quickly as martyrdom: “What the saying of the words over the bread and wine represents is the idea that with the sharing of the bread and the wine one is sharing in the results brought about by that death. That result is the creation of the very community that is thus being circumscribed and affirmed by the act of sharing. Passing around the cup to be shared by all was common in wine ceremonies. This text suggests that a similar bread ceremony must have been common as well. Thus both parts of the meal are knit together with a focus on a single interpretation.”

<sup>29</sup> In the *Apologia* of Justin Martyr (Just, *Apol* 67 – see Jasper & Cuming 1975:19-20) we find evidence for the first part of the Eucharist:

<sup>1</sup>And...we continually remind one another of these things. Those who have the means help all those in need; and we are always together.

<sup>2</sup>And we bless the Maker of all things through his Son Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit over all that we receive.

<sup>3</sup>And on the day called Sun-day an assembly is held in one place of all who live in town or country, and the records of all the apostles or writings of the prophets are read for as long as time allows.

<sup>4</sup>Then, when the reading has finished, the president in a discourse admonishes and exhorts (us) to imitate these good things.

<sup>5</sup>Then we all stand up together and offer prayers....

Stevenson (1989:47) demonstrates that this account reveals several things, even if they only reflect what Justin Martyr knew about Roman practice in 150 CE. We see that Jesus-groups gathered at a local center every Sunday (which was then a normal working day). Portions of (what we would call) the Bible were read. Because this took place long before printing was invented, the Scriptures were treated with great care. Local communities owned their own copies of parts of the Old and the New Testaments, the versions often differing slightly (Stevenson 1989:48-49). Then a sermon was preached, to link the people of that community with the passages just read. Subsequently they prayed, while standing up. This led into the Eucharistic liturgy. Consciously or not, this service of the Word is most probably based on the synagogue liturgy with which many of the earliest followers of Jesus were familiar (which would explain the similarities).

<sup>30</sup> Beattie (1968:236) observes that to bring a sacrifice, is to symbolically give a part of oneself.

<sup>31</sup> When analyzing the data regarding first-century meals, we should establish what is real and what is fictional. The reporting of meals tended to assume the literary form of the symposium as a matter of course – that was simply the way one talked about meals in written form (cf Mack 1988:114). Even the rules at club banquets and the order of the liturgy at the Jewish Passover exhibit the influence of the symposium form. We should, thus, always keep in mind that we have two interrelated phenomena that go by the name “symposium” (Smith 2003:47): “On the one hand, there is the symposium as social institution, in which actual meals were conducted according to a social pattern of codes and customs. On the other hand, there is the symposium as a literary form, in which meals, particularly those of the famous philosophers, were idealized according to established literary patterns and topoi. Distinguishing where the one begins and the other leaves off calls for exercising extreme care and subtlety in reading the data....The symposium genre was highly popular and influential far beyond philosophical circles. It enjoyed a long period of popularity extending from at least the sixth century B.C.E to the medieval period and beyond....Aspects of the genre lie behind meal descriptions and allusions in all of ancient literature, including especially Jewish and Christian writings of the period of this study” (Smith 2003:48-49). When we consider the symposium as a social institution, we realize that the term “symposium” was simply another name for the banquet, although it tended to emphasize the latter part of the banquet – the drinking party during which the entertainment of the evening would be presented. The philosophical symposium comprised the best-known subcategory of this institution. Although the literary genre of the symposium is largely connected with the philosophical tradition, it was also an actual social institution utilized as a normal feature of the philosophical schools (Smith 2003:49-50).

<sup>32</sup> According to them the earliest texts that contain the patterns to be followed in later liturgies are those of Justin Martyr (c 150) and Hippolytus (c 215).

<sup>33</sup> “The celebration of the Lord’s Supper gets the name ‘Eucharist’ from the prayer of thanksgiving that was said over the offerings [of food for the poor], as Justin suggests, ‘that we might give thanks to God for creating everything for the sake of man, for delivering us from the sin in which we were born, and for destroying the dominions and powers through Him who suffered’” (*Dial* 14 – see Oetting 1970: 37).

<sup>34</sup> Greek text of *Did* 9:1-4(see Pretorius 1980:20):

<sup>1</sup>Peri\ de\ th=j eu0xaristi/aj, ou4tw eu0xaristh/sate: <sup>2</sup>prw=ton peri\  
 tou= pothri/ou: Eu0xaristou=me/n soi, Pa/ter h9mw=n, u9pe\r th=j a9gi/aj  
 a0mpe/lou Dauei\d tou= paido/j sou, h[j e0gnw/risaj h9mi=n dia\ 0Ihsou=  
 tou= paido/j sou: soi\ h9 do/ca ei0j tou\j ai0w=naj. <sup>3</sup>peri\ de\  
 kla/smatoj: Eu0xaristou=me/n soi, pa/ter h9mw=n, u9pe\r th=j zwh=j kai\  
 gnw/sewj, h[j e0gnw/risaj h9mi=n dia\ 0Ihsou= tou= paido/j sou: soi\ h9  
 do/ca ei0j tou\j ai0w=naj. <sup>4</sup>w[sper h]n tou=to to\ kla/sma

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dieskorpisme/non e0pa/nw tw=n o0re/wn kai\ sunaxqe\n e0ge/neto e4n,  
ou4tw sunaxqh/tw sou h9 e0kklhsi/a a0po\ tw=n pera/twn th=j gh=j ei0j  
th\n sh\n basilei/an: o4ti sou= e0sti\n h9 do/ca kai\ h9 du/namij dia\  
0Ihsou= Xristou= ei0j tou\j ai0w=naj.

<sup>35</sup> Here is one account Justin Martyr gives of an early Eucharist, in his *Apologia* (Just, *Apol* 65 – see Jasper & Cuming 1975:18-19):

<sup>2</sup>When we have ended the prayers, we greet one another with a kiss. <sup>3</sup>Then bread and a cup of water and of mixed wine are brought to him who presided over the brethren, and he takes them and offers praise and glory to the Father of all in the name of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and gives thanks at some length that we have been deemed worthy of these things from him. When he has finished the prayers and thanksgiving, all the people present give their assent by saying “Amen”....<sup>5</sup>And when the president has given thanks and all the people have assented, those whom we call deacons give to each one present a portion of the bread and wine over which thanks have been given, and take them to those who are not present.

Stevenson (1989:57-60) indicates that the prayers of intercession which follow the sermon and Bible readings lead straight into a special greeting. This serves as a sign of the unity between the people. Then the table is prepared – bread and wine are brought forward. After this a prayer of thanksgiving is said over the bread and the cup. The Trinitarian formula is included in this prayer. Finally, everyone present shares the bread and wine and the gifts are taken to people who are hindered from attending Sunday worship).

<sup>36</sup> This is also called a “Eucharistic prayer”. Most of these prayers linked the Eucharist with the cross and gave thanks for the privilege of offering serviced to God. This is the prayer in the *Traditio apostolica* 4:11 of Hippolytus (see Jasper & Cuming 1975:23):

<sup>11</sup>Remembering, therefore, his death and resurrection, we offer to you the bread and the cup, giving you thanks because you have held us worthy to stand before you and minister you.

<sup>37</sup> For a translation of the text, consult Jasper & Cuming (1975:22-23); Cuming (1976:24-28); Thurian & Wainwright (1983:113-115); Dix (1992:6-9; 40-53).

<sup>38</sup> Smith (2003:67-69) holds the opinion that sacrifice constituted the primary religious ritual of all people in the Greco-Roman world, which leads him to the conclusion that the sacrificial banquet was the heart of the religious life of those people. After a sacrifice the meat that was to be eaten was taken away to be prepared and eaten elsewhere. But this does not mean that the sacrifice belonged to the sacred and the meal to the secular sphere. The two were closely interconnected. In the Greek ritual the deity could be present in different ways: The deity could be a guest, but this was a very distinctive kind of ritual. The deity could be the host, in which case the meal was perceived as being provided by the god. The deity could be understood as miraculously present in the food. This phenomenon is most clearly observable in the Christian Eucharist of late antiquity (Smith 2003:77-79). Any banquet in the Greco-Roman world could be connected with a sacrifice in some way, “in fact, among Greeks and Romans, they almost always were” (Smith 2003:85).

<sup>39</sup> For a description of how first-century Mediterranean people understood time, refer to chapter 1 as well as to [Hall \(1976:14-18\)](#); Malina (1996:180).

<sup>40</sup> People in the first-century Mediterranean world understood the final “eschatological” event as the establishing of a perfect world, a divine utopia upon this earth. They did not expect that heaven would replace earth, but rather transform it. An eschatological world was, therefore, justice and righteousness established definitively and forever here below upon a divinely perfected earth. If eschatology was imminent, apocalyptic eschatology meant the destruction not

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of time and space, earth and world, but of evil and violence, injustice and unrighteousness (Crossan 2003:43-44; see Crossan 1992:285).

<sup>41</sup> Applying this point to today, Crossan (1998:424) notes that the Christian Eucharist today is just a morsel and a sip. It is not a real meal. He asks: "You may reply, of course, that such is sufficient to symbolize the presence of Jesus and God in the community of faith. But why symbolize divinity through a medium of food that is non-food? Maybe non-food symbolizes a non-Jesus and a non-God" (Crossan 1998:424)? Crossan accepts that the Eucharist is a symbolic meal. But he wonders if this means that it should be a morsel and sip symbolic of a real meal or a real meal symbolic of God's presence. He proposes that in "early Christianity" those meals were *real meals* in the form of *share-meals*. The community shared together whatever food it had available, which both symbolized and ritualized but also actualized and materialized the equal justice of the God of Israel. Crossan (1998:444) adds: "The Common Meal Tradition can look at the Last Supper in the past, to a communal meal in the present, or to a messianic banquet in the future – or quite validly, to all of those at the same time. But it can never get away from this: *it is in food and drink offered equally to everyone that the presence of God and Jesus is found*. But food and drink are the material bases of life, so the Lord's Supper is political criticism and economic challenge as well as sacred rite and liturgical worship. It may be all right to reduce it from a full eat-and-drink meal to a token nibble-and-sip meal as long as it still symbolizes that same reality – namely: Christians claim that God and Jesus are peculiarly and especially present when food and drink are shared equally among all."

<sup>42</sup> Smith (2003:233) states that at the earliest level of tradition, "tax collector" and "sinner" are linked and function as symbolic terms to define social position through the use of a set of apparently traditional terms of slander. Smith (2003:234-235) asks what the "tax collectors and sinners" were supposed gain from this. He answers that the literary or oral narrative serves as an example of irony. That Jesus dines with "tax collectors and sinners" functions as a criticism of Jesus and is understood to be a true statement. But to the reader or listener it has a different meaning: The motif assumes that Jesus characteristically dines with what appear to be unsavory individuals, but these are in fact the types of individuals of which the kingdom is made up: "Seen from this perspective, this motif would be scandalous at the earliest level of its occurrence in this form. It would always have represented a characterization of the companions of Jesus with which the church would identify. It would serve as theological rationalization in story form to justify the situation in which the early Jesus movement found itself, one in which it was living on the fringes of its society" (Smith 2003:234). A further assumption of the story is that table fellowship with Jesus breaks down barriers that are present in the social world. Thus, Jesus had to be assumed, by all the parties involved, to be something more than just a normal teacher; that he somehow symbolized in his person the presence of the "kingdom". An explanation that is common with the Gospel narrative tradition is that Jesus somehow made table fellowship with him take on the aura of a messianic banquet. Smith (2003:124) notes that this idea is successful at a literary level, but that it is difficult to envision at the historical level. He says that it is only in a narrative form that this whole motif can function. The motif in which Jesus dined with tax collectors and sinners and, thus, blessed them in some way would, therefore, originate in the form of a *chreia*, functioning to characterize the self-consciousness of the earliest Jesus-movements. It cannot succeed if placed in a historical context, because in a literary context the situation and characters can be carefully controlled. Smith (2003:235, emphasis by Smith) explains this as follows: "A prior motif, which in fact may be historical, would be that Jesus directed his preaching toward a critique of the norms of social stratification in his society. Early Christian teachers would have taken up that tradition and created a *chreia* that utilized the stock motifs of the hero at table and the generic slanderous term *tax collectors and sinners*. In this way, Jesus was characterized as the sort of person who would do such a thing, and the *chreia* itself served as a theological justification for the self-identity of the community in which it originated." In conclusion, Smith (2003:238-239) contends that what is being identified as the historical Jesus at table is more likely the idealized characterization of Jesus at table produced by the earliest followers of Jesus: "The social realities of such meals are still being correctly assessed, but the one who presents parabolic messages by means of meal

practices is more likely to be the idealized Jesus than the historical Jesus” (Smith 2003:238). He adds that the social realities defined by these meals – in which table fellowship is equated with a new community self-consciousness – are more likely to be those of an already developing “early Christian” community than those of the crowds who came to hear Jesus teach. But he also perceives a consistency between these traditions and the historical Jesus. Jesus was most probably known, therefore, to have chosen a lifestyle different from the monastic style of John and this lifestyle was probably understood to be consistent with the tenor of his teachings as a whole. “Consequently, since the ministry of Jesus was seen early on to function in tandem with that of John, for Jesus to accept feasting as opposed to fasting might have been a change worthy of note” (Smith 2003:239).

<sup>43</sup> See Koch (2001:245-255) for a critical discussion of De Jonge’s interpretation of *koinwni/a* (1 Cor 10:16).